"THE GREAT AMERICAN ASS"

An Autobiography

(*Anonymous*)

New York
BRENTANO'S
Publishers

Library

COLLEGE OF PUGET SOUND
CHRISTVS
ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟ ΘΑΤΤΟ
FVNDAMENTVM
1903

THIS ITEM HAS BEEN
DISCARDED BY THE
UNIVERSITY
OF PUGET SOUND
COLLINS MEMORIAL LIBRARY

"THE GREAT AMERICAN ASS"

Edson, Charles
III

"THE GREAT AMERICAN ASS"

An Autobiography

(*Anonymous*)

New York
BRENTANO'S
Publishers

COPYRIGHT, 1926, BY BRENTANO'S, INC.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TACOMA, WASH.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This is an authentic autobiography of a descendant of a Puritan family. The vibrant livingness of its pages is unfailingly conveyed to the reader.

The names in this book have been made deliberately and purposely fictitious. This autobiography is presented solely for its interest and value as a strange and moving human document.

J16376

BOOK ONE

I

MY story begins at Wilber, Nebraska.

Do not search for Wilber on a map. The town is exotically discovered for you in Willa Cather's "O Pioneers." The Cather girl, a daughter of the Virginia cavaliers, came to Wilber about the time that I was born there . . . Roy Bradley, a son of the Puritan Roundheads from Massachusetts. Our dominion takes its way due Westward from Massachusetts, and my folk were the authentic Yankees in the direct line from Boston.

"There's a chiel amang ye takin' notes," quoted my Aunt Annabelle, not on the day of my birth but some six years later, forecasting that I would be the one to write the defeatist's saga of the prairie empire.

Our neighbors were largely those Bohemians that the Cather girl was for recording. But we Bradleys were the Americans: our living story writ large across a continent. Little did we dream that the new alienism of the Bohemians was destined to tread down our old Bostonism on those prairies. Now the buffalo are extinct, Boston is forgotten and the Bohemians are the Americans of Nebraska. It was the Virginia girl who has sung their new America, and is laureled for it. While I, the Yankee cub nursed on the milk of Massachusetts legend and reared up to roar the Yankee triumphs, am an ass in the wilder-

ness of frustration . . . and here I bray the lay of the Great American Ass. . . .

That the prairie pioneers, living miserably in cellars and fueling their smoky hearth fires with the punk of dried buffalo "chips," should select their young anointed ones to sing their future triumphs is not so strange. Their song has always been the Hebrew psalm and their psychology that of the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. Later, they were always losing Zion to an alien invader and finding new frontiers in their Diaspora . . . and always hankering for the mystical Homeland. Now as I look back upon my forebears and see their souls stained with the land lust of the Old Testament, I realize that generations of reading and believing the Book has made the Roundhead rascals fancy themselves God's true Chosen People. . . . And I, their appointed singer, am the Fool of the Generations.

Anyway, Aunt Annabelle was a true seer in saying this child was to be our scribe. I had asked some questions: quaint miracles of the baby mind. My Aunt was ever seeing and hearing "inspired signs." Father greeted her prophecy with a snorting sneer. He believed the prophesied bard was himself . . . that he was the culmination of our race . . . he alone was to be our David—king and singer, too. . . . Always, I was to see my father deny me; and live out in himself his child's birthright. . . .

Father. . . . As a toddler I clung to his leg to steady me in my voyage across the rag carpet, a sea of many colors. His leg seemed a great mast made of a big and sturdy cottonwood tree. In our yard there was a cotton-

wood, the starkly single tree for miles around us, the only one to breast the savage prairie blows, a lonely and great tree, comparing favorably with the tallest oaks in forested countries. . . . But father's legs, alas, were spindling compared with the average limbs of frontiersmen. I saw these legs again in horror when I grew up . . . for I, too, was grown upon the same spindling, unmanly stalks.

"Are those the pegs on which ye ran?
Why, Johnny, I scarcely knowed you. . . ."

So sang the two old gaffers who hadn't seen each other since youth and it was a favorite doggerel with my father. He knew pithy snatches of all the ballads popular in the roaming prairie world. And no one could appear so admirable to me, the clinging toddler, as my own songful father. But in time, I too sang, but with the hurt of hate —"Johnny, I scarcely knowed you——"

Another ballad father chuckled over, was, "They Never Could Physic Old Billy Barlow." Did father glory in this trait of our constipated prairie tribe . . . I wonder, recalling Aunt Annabelle's warning to me and the other children. . . . She recounted scores of instances where our kinsfolk had died of locked bowels, due to neglect of purgatives. And we would each and all be stricken and perish if we didn't keep that one function in mind. All around me I saw that the animals did not forget to eliminate: so I asked, "But why don't Nature make our bowels behave like other animals'?" It was this question that prompted her to say that I was a child taking note of the great race, even to their one defect. It did strike me that

Nature was playing a cowardly trick upon her Chosen tribe. . . . Perhaps another amendment could be enacted to control another bad American habit, an amendment to our venerable constipation.

I am descended from that pure asinine stock, the Puritans. On my paternal side I have a direct connection with John Alden and his Priscilla . . . nothing to brag about, I agree. . . . As for slick John Alden he may not have been a Puritan. No trace of his ancestry ever has been found. He may well have been a Jew from the cleverness he displayed. He joined the embarkation party at the last moment. John declared he was indispensable. Suppose the old tub sprang a leak? he suggested. Well, they needed a cooper on board to make the Mayflower tight and right, and cooper was John's trade. So he said, anyway, thuswise insinuating himself aboard the overcrowded vessel. . . . They say the Jews get in everywhere and maybe that is how they contrived to sneak into our sacred Pilgrim Fatherhood. . . . At any rate, my other Massachusetts forebears were authentic hard-boiled, impervious Puritans, and since grandmother was an Alden and a famous fool, I refer to it as the Alden strain, this strain of old stock radical hallucination. It was this strain that made my father a delusionist all his life. It fell heavily on me and made me thirty years a nincompoop.

Mother derived from the Pennsylvania Germans, a stock that had the same self-condemning traits that my father inherited through his English ancestry. . . .

And so that you may sense my life story keenly with me, let me tell you now in the first breath the way I appraise my breed's megalomaniac creed. . . . Our Puri-

tanism is a remembering backward, instead of a thinking or moving forward. In this new world, boasting that we are pioneers, all our Puritan pioneering was really a retreat. . . .

Do you see and hear us . . . depending everlastingly upon a claim to ancestry: Pilgrim Fathers, Founding Fathers, Direct Descendants, First Settlers, Sons and Daughters of the Revolution—all ancestry. We were!

And as for this country which we mourn as our violated Zion—? These United States were peopled and built up by the "aliens" we despise, the men and women, who, having no ancestry to lean upon, set to work to found their own tradition, flower their own family-tree and create a new nation.

Puritanism is a peering backward into the tribal childhood to find victory, peace, and righteousness.

II

MY mother tells how as a child she believed she could remember the day she was born. She so declared, one time, when there was company at the house. Her mother thereupon picked her up and spanked her severely on two counts: for telling what was palpably a falsehood and for retailing an improper story. . . . My mother's mother was extremely religious and always had her house full of ministers and returned missionaries. . . . Poor little mother mine disliked the trips through the Minnesota winter nights to and from the midweek prayer meetings. One night she conspired with a neighbor's child to call on her and stay over, telling grandma that the girl had come unexpectedly. . . . Well, mother got out of that particular prayer meeting but grandma, questioning the other girl's parents, learned that her daughter had told a fib. Returning that night from the prayer service, her heart elate from close communion with God, she pulled the sleeper from the trundlebed, tore off her night robe and beat her black and blue. The horror of that outrage my mother never forgot. She vowed that if ever she had children of her own they would not have to go to prayer meeting. And she vowed further that she would never feed a preacher but would give all the best parts of the chicken to her little ones. . . . So I grew up without any experience with churches or ministers. When I was twenty-one I could not tell

one denomination from another. The salvation I have sought has been in nostrums . . . not in doctrines . . . patent medicines devised, not to assure our eternal life, but to regulate our eternal liver.

When I was in my third year and could toddle about the yard without the legs of daddy to hold me up, Buffalo Bill was decimating the last herds of buffalo, a man from Buffalo named Cleveland was capturing New York for the Democrats, the War had been over some eighteen years, the word Mugwump had been used once in a political connotation in the New York Sun. A Bostonian named Sullivan had his picture in the saloons at Wilber and the boys at the livery barn had bought a set of boxing gloves. President Garfield had been shot by a disappointed office seeker; the Government was giving free homesteads as a bonus to the Boys in Blue; and Kansas was rapidly filling up with ex-soldiers.

We were expecting another baby. I was the youngest of the three and I remember how we lay three in a bed, I in the middle. Often in the night I must have become restless for mother would come and put a dry diaper on me. The air felt chilly during these changes.

We had a hired girl named Annie Dempsey. She would dress me and comb my hair and put me in my high chair and then go about getting breakfast. I would wait patiently and mother would say: "He's the best child in the world." I had a silver cup which I would use as a mallet, tapping on the table and chanting,

"Hammer Soda
Help Aunt Rhoda."

Perhaps this rigmarole had been picked up from my oldest brother Johnny who was learning his alphabet and trying to read labels on the cans in the kitchen. Arm and Hammer was a brand of soda.

Annie Dempsey and mother thought it was very clever of the baby, so sweet-tempered and patient, to rattle his empty milk cup and sing,

"Hammer Soda
Help Aunt Rhoda."

But father was annoyed at the nonsense and said: "Most likely the child is idiotic."

I never walked far without falling down. But the distances lengthened between the falls and I came to feel quite secure on my legs. I was not yet tall enough to reach into the bread boiler—we kept our bread and cake in a wash boiler behind the kitchen door—but my bigger brother reached in there and brought out a lump of crisp pie dough and gave me part of it. I got the idea that the boiler was full of pie dough. . . .

Annie Dempsey used to pick up loose pins and put them in her bodice. I did not notice that she put them in at a flat angle and supposed that she drove them straight into the flesh. So I got the idea that a woman's breast was nerveless and could be pierced unhurt. . . .

One evening father and mother had slipped around to the windowless side of the shanty, which was the western side, to escape from sight and hearing of the older boys while they furtively discussed sundry private matters.

I came upon this conference and asked why they were

there. The sunset was quite unusual, father said, and they had come out to enjoy it.

I looked into the cloud-figured west and sure enough I saw the wonders that had attracted them. A perfect picture of the Arm and Hammer trade mark in full colors filled the sky. And although I had not learned my letters yet, by a miracle I was made literate for the moment and read in a scroll of rainbow colors this legend in letters of fire—

"HAMMER SODA HELP AUNT RHODA."

I ran back around the house and into the door (there was but one entrance to the boxlike shack) and told Johnnie and Wilber to come out and read the picture in the sky. Scrambling out the door we all rushed back.

But the sign in the skies had been withdrawn. In its place was only a group of cloudlets charged with all the fiery colors of a prairie sunset. But I called on father and mother to verify what I had seen. They asked me to describe the vision—as if they had not been there and seen it too.

My oldest brother laughed at it as a fraud and said: "Roy is a liar."

Father and mother coldly confirmed him; they denied the truth of the vision and left me branded as a false witness.

And when I pleaded with my mother to tell the truth and verify the glorious soda sign in the sky and clear me of a bad name, she said impatiently, under her husband's frown, "Stop, Roy, it is terrible to repeat a lie."

And father drowned me in his cold dismissal . . . "Mother," said he, "we've raised a foolish child."

And so they drowned in dark waters my first vision. . . .

III

EARLY recollection . . . the strange, groping turmoil of emergence . . . early recollection returns to me in smells and sounds.

I can remember father's general store in Wilber, although I was hardly more than a baby at the time. The town was as young as I. The virgin sod under the stores and slat-sidewalks was still unrotted. The county had not yet built a courthouse, nor chosen a center of business. Now all Wilber itched with the greedy ambition to win for itself the county seat. My uncle, Captain Bass Geeshan, ran the grain store. He was Wilber's banner-bearer in the battle for county honors and profits. Captain Bass was also the best poker player for a hundred miles around and father hated him for it. Father just naturally opposed Bass's ideas. Did Bass say Wilber would be made rich by the county seat? then father said the merchants would be ruined by it. It all came of father losing his overcoat to Bass in a tight game of draw poker.

Once a week the bloods of the hamlet foregathered in Bass's grain office for an all-night session. The Captain was a clever and ironic rascal. He enjoyed cheating for the deviltry of it and because he could make a fool of the other fellow. And he did like to show up my stiff-necked dad. Anyway he won the overcoat in a double deal, and set to humiliating his relative before their

cronies. "Here," said Bass, "take that coat and go to bed like a good boy. Grow up and learn the game and then come back." Of course Geeshan didn't plan to give the coat back, yet he did want the neighbors present to think he was the last man to deprive his brother-in-law of his overcoat while the weather was below zero. He retained the garment by infuriating father, whose mulish pride wouldn't let him accept its return. The ass dashed out of doors, fought his way home through a blizzard and caught the quinsy. . . . Thereafter Uncle Bass wore the overcoat with bland equanimity.

Father was all the more convinced then that the business of bribing voters to win the county seat was expensive folly. The nearby town of Hastings was our rival and as the time for the election came closer the struggle increased in bitterness. It was a struggle that took place in every prairie province when the settlers left their sod-houses and reared wooden shacks and false-front stores at the crossroads where the hamlets clustered. Father was in the way of being Wilber's leading merchant and Uncle Bass determined to convert him to the county cause and make him the bell-wether.

He took tight-mouthed dad on a prairie-chicken hunt, driving in a buckboard out into the unbroken sections of buffalo grass. No matter what Bass said, father refused to budge. And Uncle Bass being the superior poker player proceeded again to humiliate the bad loser. He started to cozen him out of his glooms, saying the hunting would be fine and the prairie chickens fat where they were going.

Captain Geeshan said in a most comradely manner,

"Now, John, when we flush a bird, I'll give you the first shot at it. If you miss, then I'll bring it down."

Soon enough a chicken rose whirring from the bunch grass. Father raised his gun. The chicken fell as from its silent muzzle. Bird after bird rose and every time father took aim the birds fell dead without his firing a shot.

"And that's the way he gave me the first shot at them," father afterwards complained to mother.

As for the Captain he returned home with a full bag and rounded up the campaign committee to call upon father and ask for a contribution for the county seat fight.

Geeshan, the spokesman, said, "You'll get a hundredfold return on your money, John. All the farmers will have to come to the county seat to do business. If Wilber wins, the Wilber merchants will get the first chance at their trade."

Then he added significantly, "Hastings, you know, will have to take the second shot at it."

Father just grunted and looked at the flies on the clapboard ceiling. Then the wily captain drew him to one side, whispering, "Life is a poker game. You don't have to have the cards to win. The best bluff wins anyhow. I tell you what you do. Give the committee your note for $500 and they can show it to the other merchants and tell them it's your contribution. Among us we understand it's a dummy note, and never to be paid. After the campaign I'll return it to you. Your note will enable us to collect plenty of real money from the other citizens who look up to you as a smart, careful and shrewd businessman."

Father liked to think his fellow merchants were a parcel of fools and gave his note, although he kept right on telling every one the campaign was expensive foolishness. But the symbol of his note in hand was believed as against his spoken opinion. This bait drew many contributions and father thought himself a great hand at poker bluffing.

The day before the election the armed citizenry of Wilber marched upon the dugout which had served as a miniature county court in the post-Territorial days. Naturally our men had little faith in the franchise of a republic. For weeks they had been corrupting the farmer voters with bad whisky and cash tokens; but Hastings was always going us one better, drink for drink, dollar for dollar. Therefore indignant Wilber decided to seize its "rights" in the face of blatant corruption. Well, the Hastings outfit felt equally incensed against dishonest balloting. Their citizens made up superior force which quickly routed the Wilberites. In a frenzy of triumphant virtue the Hastings men confiscated the county records, seals and voting machinery. . . . When the higgledy-piggledy voting was done and the hectic count taken, Wilber was found badly beaten.

But Captain Bass, dear uncle, knew how to capitalize defeat. He denounced father for a traitor, accused him of selling out to Hastings in some mysterious and subtle way and finally proved his charge by discounting the "dummy" note at the bank, and sharing the cash with the committee. Soon enough father convicted himself in the eyes of his townsmen by refusing to honor the note.

IV

OUR family was ostracized. That prairie tribe, conglomerate of Dutchman, Bohunk, Railroad Irish and Indiana Yankee, were united in their prairie patriotism and prejudice. They were one hundred per cent. provincial Wilberite.

The wheat stacks, where I used to go to catch pigeons, were father's property. Some one crept up in the night and burned them to avenge the Bradleys' disloyalty. Crafty Captain Bass Geeshan came the next morning and tracked the incendiary back to his own very door! He followed the yellow footprints where the white dew had been dashed from the mist-pearled stubble. The townsmen were hilariously delighted with his frolicsome sleuthing.

But father did not go to law. He was already involved in one nasty lawsuit and every man's hand turned against him. The bank had started a suit in the new court to recover five hundred dollars, interest and costs on what father had believed was an unredeemable dummy note. At this time father was hardly more than a boy, twenty-five, and no match for his brother-in-law, forty-five years old and a climber from the ranks in Grant's roughneck army.

Father was the kind of man who could feel he had done something perfectly just in giving a false bond with which to lure yokels. He believed piously in the wolfish tradition—"Buyer beware!" Also he considered it the height

of dishonor to exact payment of such a note. . . . It was as clear as most religious reasoning. . . . He thought the patriots, being low-grade fools, were destined anyway to be turned into plucked geese. Even as he was being a live-plucked goose himself he tossed and writhed protesting like the most stubborn animal in Creationdom. . . . And so all through the career of our strange family, father taught us to fight with stupid stubbornness against such lay figures as "sleek Impostor Patriots who fatten on us and Big Washington Rascals who rob us." . . . You see, father was an individualist pirate and wanted the loot all for himself . . . and how I wish for all our sakes he had taught us to coöperate and play with the patriots and rascals, for then we should have lived in peace and plenty.

Thus you see us mulishly staying out a bitter, tragic year in Wilber, because father did not know how to save himself in gracious surrender. Annie Dempsey, our loyal good-hearted girl of all work, killed herself with strychnine over the county seat disaster.

She had gone to the town masquerade ball with her yokel beau. Her gallant Jim was jibed at for bringing the hated enemy's maid. Whereupon Jim demonstrated his invincible patriotism by publicly jilting her then and there, ordering her from the crude ballroom while the drunken mob jeered the startled girl. . . . I remember the dress she wore that night, as I remember her devotion and kindness: how she had saved me when I went exploring the newly laid railroad tracks and rescued me when I went wandering barefooted in the harsh stubble. . . . Mother had helped her decorate the voluminous

blue costume with full moons and crescents and five-pointed stars cut from imitation gold leaf and pasted on the gown. Hers was the gayest gown at the ball and Annie was despised all the more for accepting too pretty a gift from a traitor's wife.

To twit and torment one another in that frontier society was the very soul of social intercourse. Annie's wild-eyed flight from the place was the event of the ball. Jim had scorned the woman he was going to marry just to please the mob mind . . . and she went home and took strychnine—in her own way also submitting to the mob will.

Of course, father's general store was boycotted. He waited with the indomitableness of a donkey. The townsmen were only geese honking at him for their lost quills of pride. I wish we had moved away at once or that father had said philosophically to Uncle Bass when he had treacherously cashed the note, "Take it and welcome, you spawn-of-a-sow, and be damned in God's good time."

It would have been better for all of us. That black year of boycott was an eternity of hell for our young mother. She was a social creature by nature, young, beautiful, and a gifted singer. The song died in her heart under the ostracism. Louis Bamnek, the Bohemian saloonkeeper, laughed leeringly at her because he heard her singing a harmless song brought to the prairie-land by circus clowns:

"Pull down the blind, pull down the blind,
Pull down the blind, love, come, don't be unkind;
Though we're alone, bear this in mind;
Some one is looking, love, pull down the blind."

He said men and their whores were singing these smutty lines in every saloon in Omaha, and the high-toned uppity wife of that traitor merchant didn't have sense enough to know that this was a bawdy song. But the jibe jabbed into her puritan core.

It seems absurd to suffer over such slights, to be murdered by such defeats. But the Bradleys have ever been murdered by them. Father, brooding in his unvisited store became like a disconsolate Poe in his melancholy. Mother stung by ribald critics, and starved for social nurture even as she hungered for green herbage in that desert land, grew morbid.

Meanwhile there sucked at the juices of her withering life another little Americano. This was to be the strangely gifted gnome, Tom Bradley, my beloved brother, the one who was nearest to me in years and nearest in temperament, but doomed to walk the shadow world groping through a penumbra until youth died and the years of opportunity were gone.

In my ears still rings the agony of his satiric cry—paraphrasing Lincoln's—"All that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to your anger, mother"—"All that I ain't . . . all that I never hope to be—I owe to my demon father."

V

THE prairies are a treeless land as they are turnipless. We turnip-loving Yankees went there a tree-tribe trying the desert for the first time. Far and forgotten were our Danish forefolk who dwelt in oak forests and cleared them to grow kraut. When we were founding Wilber, the old Daneland had become a desert of heather, a soil soured by too much cropping, and the Danes were redeeming it and resweetening it to raise gardens again.

We were unforested fools spewed on the prairies of Nebraska. We sprouted nothing in that buffalo desert dust but corn and man—cow fodder and cannon fodder.

The Germanic settlers shipped out corn and brought in barreled sauerkraut "to prevent sickness" . . . the jest was an uproarious one to the Yankee farmers. Father would never eat cabbage, raw, cooked or pickled. Is it not recorded of Beau Brummel that he broke off his engagement to an English lady when he learned that she ate cabbage? We in Wilber carried on the great tradition.

Turnips the Yankee tribe will eat, when starved to 'em. But to eat kraut would write one down an ass. The German settlers had no pride to save, the Americanos saying, "All Dutchmen are born idiotic anyway." Born comic, they would naturally eat a comic dish like sauerkraut. But for them to look upon their debauched taste as a worthy trait instead of a shame to their tribe was too much for

the Yankee sense of humor. And for the squareheads to speak openly of their slimy mess as a strength to their limbs and medicine to their liver gave the Yankee such a laugh that it was well nigh medicinal to him.

The prairies are a land of lime. But we became limeless there. The limeless are forever crying for lime. There is lime in a cabbage leaf. But father would not eat of that fruit and the teeth of the children are on edge. If my brothers and I have become the sour cabbage heads of America it is because our father would not eat it before us.

One Wilberite from Indiana imported a barrel of Swedish turnips to those sod-bound plains. His prairie neighbors for miles around now sensed a haunting fragrance more compelling than the attar of the prairie rose. Out of their sod houses they came shamelessly importuning him for just one turnip . . . the ballad of the Irish famine says: "Give me three grains of corn, mother, only three grains of corn. 'Twill keep what little life I have till the coming of the morn." . . .

Just so the constipated pioneers were saved for History by a humble turnip.

The limeless are forever crying for lime.

O Pioneers, ye ask for Empire!

It is the moan out of your colons fevered for a mess of herbage. It is Lincoln's longing for the White House, Cæsar aching for the scepter.

It is your gullet's soul sighing for a turnip. . . .

Starved spiritually by social ostracism even as her body had been starved by the lack of fruits and herbs, our mother was in the pangs of parturition . . . the fourth

baby in five years. The German blood in her plasm had long pleaded for cabbage and turnips. The Yankee blood in her puritan man denounced it with scornful laughter. The wifeliness of her German blood told her, Obey the Good Man. His tyranny . . . her destruction. . . . So "Dutch" energy and obedience yoked to Yankee costiveness and pride had flogged the reluctant desert until the prairie bore wheat. Even as the successive croppings have sapped the lime until that soil is sour now, so the succession of babies sapped the saline blood of our young mother until she soured with the fourth crop. Out of the bride's bones the minerals were fast quarried to make the little bodies and now there was not enough for Tom.

The conquering race had gone rickety.

The heir to our empire is a goblin child and the kingdom he will go conquering is fantasy.

At his birth Tom's aching mother saw phantoms parading at the foot of the bed, hideous harridans, apes, gnomes, grimacing oafs and screaming monsters. Images were running amuck in her mind because there was not salt enough in her blood to sterilize the ferment in her brain.

The baby's head was too big for his body, and his mother suffered fearful lacerations. She had yearned five years for turnips, and now she brought forth a turnip-headed child . . . and because she went hungry for cabbage, her baby was a genius.

Months passed before the baby's spine grew strong enough to lift the head that lolled on its neck like a pumpkin on a vine.

But his ego was militant from the start; before he was

out of his cradle he used to black the eyes of the Bohemian babies that were brought near him. He bunged their eyes with his milk cup.

I was a child pacifist; surprised at his war fervor. Dearly I loved the brown-eyed pumpkin-headed little gnome brother and it shocked me to see him smash every baby that was held near him.

I know now he was fighting to reform a wicked world; there was nothing imperial in him, nothing earthly or dross; he struck for God, Freedom and our Native Land. The limeless children in their hallucinations are fighting for what they need.

So Brother Tom was born in the midst of hallucination. Not only the hallucinations of his starved mother whose nerves screamed, "Fee, fi, fo, fum! Ogres are sucking the marrow from the bones of Englishmen," but the hallucination of our tortured, dear father, who in fighting for the $500 stolen by the tricky patriots under the guise of a war to make the county seat safe for Wilber, imagined he was fighting for truth and justice.

Not out of fairyland into a matter-o'-fact world was little Tom Bradley born. He was no pixie soul under a cabbage leaf waiting to be born into a stolid Dutch baby in Saline County, Nebraska. 'Twas t'other way round with that fairy changeling. Nebraska was to be a world of nonumbilicated phantoms to him. Out of the reality of pre-natal existence he was born into an unreal country. Out of the limelight of the matrix stage he stepped into a darkened alley of dream. From the real world of his mother's flesh, parturition was pushing him into fairyland,

birth ushered him into this bedlam land where he must walk forever as the king of fools.

But every leer of the grimacing fool was to wrench a pang from the father. And that father was himself to be a Lear, a mad Lear crazed by the false friends he trusted and crucifying the loyal child that truly loved him.

Father had stayed a year in his deserted store, to show them that the boycott could not overawe him. . . . And now facts can never convince his goblin child.

He won his lawsuit, refusing to pay the note so fraudulently wheedled from him by the lying patriots. All that they could make him pay was his sanity—his life—and the lives of his posterity.

An acid-crazed mother, a pumpkin-headed child, a father morally victorious.

Victory, Victory. Men and gods must have victory.

VI

RECALLED. . . . Tom is three and madly militant. I see him armed with a lath for a sword and posed like another St. George. Down goes the dragon, this time a curious rooster, the bird's head cracked unevenly like a pincered nut. And Tom behaves like a hero who has liberated a terror-stricken nation. . . .

But this happened in Kansas. Historic Kansas. Bleeding Kansas. Droughty Kansas whose wrinkled dugs nursed the nation's sacred Prohibition Cause. . . .

A new town straggling beside a new railroad was Harrow. . . .

Father had abandoned Wilber and left his family with Uncle Bass Geeshan, established himself in the new town of Harrow among newer buffalo wallows farther west of Saline County, rented a cellar (all pioneer houses were dugouts), and built a one-story shack above it which he proclaimed as the *State Bank of Harrow.*

I can remember the day we came to Harrow, mother and the four children. Our train had jostled all day across the prairies, winding forever among the draws and creek bottoms, seeking the easiest grade, the bell-domed smokestack on the little engine coughing sparks high into the air. And when the prairie twilight was all translucent greens and yellows, we came up through a cut onto the highland and the train stopped for Harrow.

I can see father yet as he stood upon the platform look-

ing for his loved ones. He swung me onto his shoulder and picked up the traveling bag. Mother carried the baby. Johnnie and Wilber scurried along, eager to see the cellar we were to live in.

Down a flight of stone stairs behind the sidewalk we descended to our underground home. Great things were hoped for from this new beginning.

"We're going to Kansas to live in a cellar,
We're going to Kansas to live in a cellar,"

had been the song I sang on the train, probably having picked it up from that same Aunt Annabelle who probably was the source of my former slogan

"Hammer soda, help Aunt Rhoda."

But father was irked and aggrieved by my song and again remarked that the child must be a simpleton to proclaim our lowly status. A rising family three centuries in America and twenty-five years in the prairie states had not risen very high. We were still below the surface of the ground. We had had setbacks, true. From now on the course of empire would take its way. Towns would grow into cities, current wealth become permanent fortunes, families be founded. Father at twenty-eight was a banker and optimistic. Mother, who was a suckling baby when Fort Sumter fell, was now twenty-six, and the mother of four. And as a song of that period had it, "The Rebel rides on his raids no more." That year the first Democrat since the Civil War was elected President.

It was two years before the buffalo herds all suddenly departed from the Kansas prairies, much to the surprise of the Kansas settlers. But this was scarcely odd because they'd eaten every one, as the poet said in "Alice in Wonderland."

We had a buffalo robe and also a lion's skin. At least I thought it was a lion's skin because it had the picture of a lion on it, and not until a year later, when Aunt Annabelle came to our household again was I old enough to be taught that it was only a loom-woven laprobe despite the lion's picture. I had regarded the lion's signature as authentic and dared question it no further.

With the buffalo robe and the lion laprobe they made a bed in the middle of the floor and put us three children on it. There were two rooms in our cellar, and the young banker had been able to equip one of them with a bed, to which he and mother and the elfin baby now retired. And so we began our life in Kansas.

VII

BECAUSE brother Tommie's head was too big he was always falling down and hurting himself. It was just as though he were top-heavy. These bumps made him faint. His face turned bloodless and he looked like a corpse. "I know I'll never raise that child," my mother sighed. And because I loved Tommie so, I was terrified. Night after night I dreamed that Tommie was dead. I could see him stumble, fall and bump his head upon the cobbles. I would run to him, pick him up, fondle him to my childish breast and kiss his bruised brow. Then the heavens would swing open like the door of our haymow and three angels would thrust out their shining heads and say: "Too late. Too late. He is dead!" My grief would be so great I could not stand it; and I would awake. I could feel his warm body beside me and see his sleeping head burrowing in the pillow; and I would listen to his breathing and be so glad.

This dream recurred from childhood into youth for twenty years or more; yet all this poignant terror had no meaning, and the premonitions proved untrue.

Harrow was a typical prairie hamlet clinging bravely to the hostile earth under a vicious, windswept sky. There was one street, and on each side stood rows of stores in false-front shacks. Around it swept the treeless prairies, changeful in mood, haunted with hostile imps or friendly fairies.

At the edge of the prairie outside the surveyed limits of the town, father bought an acre of ground and built himself the biggest house in that settlement. He had prospered. He bragged his reasons for buying and building outside the town until he irritated the local patriots. The owners of town lots were asking a hundred dollars and upwards for a single lot a third of an acre in size. Father paid a hundred dollars and got a whole acre, and furthermore his home was not subject to town taxation. This naturally affronted the citizens who had town lots for sale. They felt that it was mean and ornery for the richest man in town to set so bad an example, and dodge taxes.

About this time the fifth son was born, marching behind the rickety one, but this Bradley, fortunately, never filled its lungs, but gave one disdainful gasp and died. Father had just bought a farm half a mile out of town, and he buried the lost infant out there on the prairie to save buying a lot in the cemetery.

Yet those were happy days. We marched triumphant. That was the year that father was a comic generalissimo in the war against Chile. To us it was a real enough war. There was a subdued and awful air when father and mother discussed the gathering of the war clouds like the mood of their meeting behind the Wilber house. But this was not another tragedy like the county seat war. It was as visionary and unmeaning as the Arm and Hammer sign that I had seen in the skies. It was a hoax. It was a triumph of cheating and jesting. It showed that father had learned the lesson of Captain Geeshan and could re-

peat it with a comic flourish that would have immortalized him among humorists.

God, what a brilliant man he seemed to us. We idolized him. He was handsome, the image of young Mark Twain with bushy brown hair above a strong face, the face of his handsome, cold and erratic mother. The village urchins who were allowed to run the streets at night would tell us young Bradleys: "Last night at Linder's store your dad made them all pull up their socks and wipe off their chins. Your dad had 'em going south on a hog train. You ought to be proud of having such a smart pa. I could listen to him talk all night."

The land bonus to ex-soldiers had filled Kansas with veterans of the Union army. Everything was Republican and G.A.R. The Bohemians took no part in political debates, unfamiliar with our customs and far from mastery of our forensic idiom. "Pull up your socks and wipe off your chin," was as crushing a rejoinder as ever leveled at the arguments of a patriarch. "Does your mother know you're out?" was the stock answer of the old to the beardless debater. "Harrison's elected and don't you forget it," was the gist of most arguments.

But father could more than hold his own against these parrot argufiers of Republicanism. He and his friend Stan Reynolds were almost the whole crop of Democrats in Harrow. But they were important, one being the postmaster and the other the banker. But more important still, their talk was not parroted, it was coined momentarily in their agile minds.

"We'll mash old Harrison into the mud,
With a Chinese pig tail to chew for a cud,"

sang out the postmaster, supplying an added verse to a campaign song the Republicans had just sung. And even the Republicans had to laugh at the absurdity of their bewhiskered dignitary in his Grandfather's Hat being mashed into the mud by Stanley Reynolds, of Harrow, chewing a Chinese pigtail as his cud of reflection.

Charley Dents, the blacksmith, always argued the Harrow Democrats down by telling them how he stood at Lookout Mountain and calmly opposed his heroic flesh to the crazy cannonballs of the Democratic traitors. "When I stood at Missionary Ridge and let the Democrats hurl red-hot cannonballs at me," argued Charley, "I was fighting for the freedom of man."

Postmaster Reynolds and Banker Bradley were nettled by the never-ending sacrifices of this Village Blacksmith who had stood at Gettysburg . . . at Shiloh . . . the Wilderness and every other battle except Bull Run . . . and by opposing his muscled breast to the Democratic cannonballs had forever closed the mouths of Harrow's Democratic argufiers.

Postmaster Reynolds quietly wrote to Washington and learned the veteran's record. Through no fault of Charley Dents' he was a seventeen-year-old in a training camp when a bright April day ended it all in 1865. So father and Stan Reynolds knew that only in fancy had this G.A.R. man ever exposed his bosom to the red-hot slings of the embattled Democrats.

Did they suddenly, in the midst of a town store argument where Dents was taking his stand at Missionary Ridge, denounce him as a soldier that had never smelled smoke? Nothing so puerile as that. Their comic genius

told them to be colossal. They would give him a chance to advance bumptiously to do battle in a make-believe war, battle for his country.

The debates took place in Nelson Linder's store. Nelse was the leader of the Republicans and my father's favorite opponent. He was a fat, prosperous Swede, dignified in bearing and sound in his political philosophy, but the agile brilliance of my father's mind was like lightning and no Swede was fast enough to combat it.

"If you know so much on these national questions," he jibed at father, "why don't they send you to Congress?"

"Ask me something harder," laughed father. "All statesmen have big bellies. The voters would never think me worthy of Congress just because I have brains. But, Nelse, if I had your belly with my brains they'd make me President."

Frank Baker, a socialist loafer, who had read books on Mormonism, Communism and Popery, was not welcomed by the debaters because he had a line of jargon unknown to them. Instead of saying

"Dead rats and pickled cats
Are good enough for Democrats"

he would mention fiat money, economic value and capital and labor. The parroters couldn't match words with this fellow. But father would take on anybody.

"Frank," he interposed when the socialist was in the midst of a harangue, "why are you always talking of capital and labor? What do you know about either?"

"I know that labor produces everything," said Frank.

"Then labor produces capital," said father. "Why haven't you got any capital, Frank? Don't you ever labor?"

"I have capital," cried the insulted man.

"Where is your capital, Frank?" asked father, maddeningly.

Frank flung out his fists and opened his hands. He clutched and opened them under father's nose. They were not horny like a toiler's hands.

"These, sir, are my capital," he yelped.

"God gave the fish his fins, but he must wiggle 'em ere he swims."

And father's retort brought howls of laughter.

In those days convictions had nothing to do with a man's politics. The veterans voted as they had shot. The younger generation voted as their fathers voted.

"Why should we exclude the Chinese?" demanded Nelse Linder. "They're as good as the Bohemians, aren't they? As industrious as the Yankees, aren't they? As virtuous as Mary E. Lease, aren't they? And just as honest as George Washington. Then why exclude the Chinese from American citizenship? I defy anybody in this store to name one single trait in which the Chinese are different from Americans."

"They wear shirts outside of their breeches," said father. And the audience yelled, the children trebling and shrilling their own particular appreciation. You can't fool a gang of kids. When they pick out a man as their hero, you need no further indorsement of that man.

As a tribute to the kids yelling for him from the barrel tops and the cracker boxes, father put the Chinese ques-

tion in terms that they could understand. I have never forgotten it.

"The Chinese will work all day for a nickel. They are so saving that they can live on five cents a day. That means that they chew their chewing gum for seven months, and when it falls apart they grease it to make it stick together again instead of spending a penny for a sweet new stick. When the Chinese take this country, every boy can expect to wait six months for his stick of candy or chewing gum."

I have never had any use for a Chinaman since that day. Of course, all the kids in Harrow were Republicans except the sons of Bradley and Stanley Reynolds. Being outnumbered we were whipped in battle every time the sons of Republicans ganged us. But although they licked us for being Democrats, they took their hats off to our Democratic father. Kids will always follow a champion; they tarry not to lick the wounds of any loser. And my father could vanquish their own fathers in debate. He forever made their dads pull up their socks and wipe off their chins. He always had them on a hog train going south. He was their hero.

Yes, they were great days. And although Cleveland was defeated, father was prospering and the town hailed his leadership and he was happy. He owned a farm, beside the country acre on which his great house stood, and he was running a bank and a lumber yard.

He was a hog buyer, a steer feeder and a speculator in corn. One year he bought corn for ten and twelve cents a bushel, building long lines of corn cribs into which the prairie farmers shoveled the great yellow ears as fast as

his carpenters could build the cribs. A farmer had to load his wagon high with double sideboards to haul enough to get five dollars for a load. In a few months corn went to sixty cents a bushel and these cribs poured out a golden harvest for the shrewd Yankee.

As I look back I see this time as the high tide of the Bradley fortunes. It was like the Southern flood at Gettysburg whose topmost spray was Pickett's charge on Cemetery Ridge . . . "where the way was barred . . . ." I am now quoting Charley Dents with his breast exposed to the Democratic cannonballs.

Meanwhile the war that father and Postmaster Reynolds plotted against Chile loomed up with the menace of an approaching army.

VIII

I GOT wind that war was actually started by the solemn whisperings of father and mother. Father was grave because the joke had worked out better than he expected. He and the Democratic postmaster had set in motion a malicious hoax after Harrison's election and the old soldiers, including Charley Dents, were stepping high. Those Democrats, brilliant in brain but trampled down by the ever marching million of Grant's G.A.R., had taken the revenge of the witty, which is to build an intellectual pitfall for fools. It was for the vulnerable Charley Dents they had laid their trap.

As a postmaster soon to be removed by the victorious Republicans, Stan Reynolds said to father: "Let's write a letter from the War Department saying that President Harrison attributes his carrying Kansas to the noble speeches Charley Dents has made in which he told of standing at Missionary Ridge, at Shiloh, at the Fall of Richmond, with his breast bared to Democratic cannons. Let's write that the War Department finds he was not at any of those battles but for him never to confess it if the Democrats of Harrow question his record."

The postmaster then went on to explain his scheme. "After Dents has received the letter," he said, "we will start an argument to the effect that Dents was never in the Civil War. After he has repudiated our arguments,

we will tussle with him in Linder's store and we'll pull this letter out of his pocket and read it to the crowd. And we'll have as a postscript something written by Harrison's secretary of war:

"Keep up the good lies. That's what makes Republican successes."

It was a witty scheme and speaks well for the subtlety of the best minds among the mediocrities and roughnecks of the buffalo frontier.

Fortunately for the conspirators the break with Chile happened at that time. Two American sailors had been murdered during a revolution in Valparaiso, Chile's capital, and the American minister, Patrick Egan, announced that America would fight to avenge the outrage. And now the malicious hoax that father and Reynolds were bent on launching was to become the most delicious bamboozlement that could have happened.

The letter they concocted read:

"Dear Private Dents:

"Having declared war on Chile, I, President Benjamin Harrison, Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, and, by the Grace of God, Emperor of India, commission you to raise a company of volunteers. Having heard of your valiant stand on Missionary Ridge, Shiloh, Lookout Mountain and other decisive battles of the Civil War and learning that you are unwounded and in perfect physical condition, I regard you as the ideal man to raise a military company in Harrow. We must fight for the flag, although I regard this war as unnecessary, having been pro-

voked by the hot-headed Irish temperament of Minister Pat Egan.

"Awaiting your reply, I am yours truly,

"Benjamin Harrison, Pres. of U. S. and Commander in Chief of the Army."

This happened in Kansas in the year 1890. I was then nine years old.

That night at Linder's store, father and the lame duck postmaster thought, "We will feed fat the ancient grudge we bear the G.A.R." They would struggle with the handsome veteran and read the letter rifled from his reluctant pocket. How the kids would yell. For even a child would appreciate the postscript: "We find no record of your participation in those battles. Keep up the good lies. They help the Republicans."

IX

POSTMASTER REYNOLDS came running into father's bank (still located above the cellar where we had begun life in Kansas, and next door to the Harrow post office) and told him that this scheme had gone awry.

"Within five minutes of receiving his commission in the war with Chile," was Reynolds' report, "Private Dents answered the letter and accepted!

"My God!" added the Postmaster, "when that letter gets to Washington the Post Office Inspector will get on our trail and jail us both."

The conspirators had forged the name of the President and they had gone to the printing office (in charge of the third Democrat of Harrow) and printed a letter-head reading WAR DEPARTMENT.

Never had they dreamed that Charley Dents would be brave enough to accept a commission in the terrible war with Chile. They had forevisioned a scuffle with him in Nelse Linder's store, the picking of his pocket and the reading of his letter from the War Department; then to complete their vengeful prank they would destroy it before the eyes of their audience. The imaginary Chilean war was to have ended thus, and the Democrats would have been forfended from betrayal, "blessed with victory and peace."

Father blanched at this news. Then it occurred to him that they must stop the letter Dents had mailed.

If it is crime to destroy mail matter, it is no worse a crime to forge the President's name on a fraudulent document from the War Department.

"We might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," said father.

They lifted the letter from the mail box and wrote an answer to it. And then began a series of state papers and war notes probably nowhere equaled on the world stage until a generation later when Woodrow Wilson made a literary success out of a war.

Over his blacksmith shop, Charley Dents ran up the Star Spangled Banner after firing the President's salute with his anvil—"Anvil firing" is done by placing a pile of powder on a flat surface and covering it with the hollow base of a blacksmith's anvil; the powder is then ignited, giving off a detonation like a cannon. The blacksmith at once opened muster books on his anvil block, and soon enlisted upwards of ninety men.

Dannie Potensky, twenty-one-year-old son of the Bohemian druggist, was one of the first to enlist in the defense of America against the Chilean greasers. He drilled and pranced, and announced that he hoped to be an officer. Just who were the other ninety boys, enlisted in the blacksmith's muster rolls, I do not know. Thirty-seven years have passed, and in that time other wars and other troubles have engrossed my attention. But I remember that I took the War with Chile seriously. That is, I did not doubt that the soldiers drilling in Dents' blacksmith shop were actually commanded by the President and were

destined to teach the Chileans that Uncle Sam was not to be trifled with.

We kids were chiefly interested in the fact that the creeks were very low and seemed to be going dry; the pools were easy to seine and yielded lots of catfish, chubs and suckers. A box car had jumped the track in switching and our gang discovered that the door was unsealed and the boxes of raisins and bags of peanuts had been broken open in the concussion of jolting on the ties. Compared with those treats, the war with Chile meant little to us youngsters.

Many citizens and farmers used to come to our house in the evening to hear father's views on the war. A banker was supposed to know more about such abstruse things as foreign wars—than corn growers and hog fatteners did. And in this case they were consulting the right authority. Father knew all about the war, but he didn't tell all he knew. Whether or not all wars are made by bankers and politicians—as Henry Ford insists —at any rate, this one was.

One farmer said: "They tell me that the whole war was brought on by the American Minister to Chile, Pat Egan. I don't know why Uncle Sam keeps sending preachers to foreign countries. For if Uncle Sam knew preachers like I do he would know that the only thing a preacher ever does is start trouble."

Mother afterwards repeated this conversation with supercilious amazement. She knew that foreign ministers meant something other than chicken-eating preachers.

This was twenty-five years after the close of the Civil

War and many of the Old Veterans were in their early forties.

"Why don't you G.A.R. men go down and enlist in a body?" father asked Hank Sayer, commander of the local post. "You are all able-bodied men of military age. You claim you saved the Union for us. You exposed your breasts to the Democratic cannon. Now Chile is about to crush this Union, and a Republican President has called for volunteers. Why don't you answer?"

Hank Sayer was not a bad fellow even if the postmaster did hate his G.A.R. activities. He had taken it in good part when Reynolds wrote a political poem about the G.A.R. parade. Editor John Brown printed it in his absurd little weekly paper—the concluding couplet of which had been:

> "Old Hank Sayer, bringing up the rear,
> Along came Banker Bradley and spit in his ear."

At this literary indignity the veteran's eye had twinkled unmaliciously and thereby he proved his bravery and his greatness. Answering father's question as to why he did not enlist in the war to keep Chile from smashing this nation, the good-natured veteran replied:

"I'm not of a warlike nature. The reason I went to the Civil War was to escape from everlasting conflict. You see, in a war they only fight a battle every six months or so. But in our home in Vermont it was a continual warfare.

"My dad was one of those New England fathers that it was impossible for any son to please. I don't claim

that I was a high-grade sample of a son, but several of my brothers and sisters were. They had risen to high places in life. One sister became president of a girls' school and one brother is a United States Senator and another one invented the safety bicycle. But father drove them all from home because he said they were such fools that they didn't know how to farm. Their clumsiness cost him more than their labor was worth; so he told them to 'Get out,' and they went to Boston and New York.

"I was the youngest and I was loyal to father; I thought that the older children probably were mean and incompetent, in the way father complained of them. I thought I would be his mainstay, resolved I would never disappoint him. But when I was eleven he told me to hold a young bull he wanted to castrate. Well, the bull broke away from me, my strength being too feeble for him, and father called me a damn fool. Next year the maple syrup burned and was too bitter to sell, and father blamed me for that, too. I never got a word of praise from him in all my life. One day when I was chopping wood I accidentally cut off the finger of my right hand. Father laughed and said: 'You would have cut your buttocks off if they hadn't been safely behind you.'

"My boyish admiration and natural love for father began to curdle under the slow torture. . . . I'll never forget a scene in the winter of 1863. I was out in the wood-lot hauling in a load of logs. I drove too near a stump and the hub of my logging wagon got hung up. I gee-ed my oxen and tried to pull the wagon off the stump when 'Crack,' I heard the tongue break. Father

would storm about that. But I was hung up still on the stump. I took the ax and began chopping the stump under the hub to release it.

"At about the third chop I missed the stump and hit the iron ferrule on the hub. The ax broke. God help me! An ox cost six dollars in those days and a farm laborer could earn about two axes in a month. Still trying to pull off the stump I broke a tug. But at last I got free and took my load to the barnyard.

"Father looked at the broken tug where I had spliced it. Then he looked at the broken tongue of the wagon. Finally he examined the broken ax. He threw it down, and said:

" 'Why didn't you break your God-damn neck, too?'

"I didn't try to eat any supper. I lay in bed unable to sleep. I got up, sneaked out of the house and walked all that night, stumbling among the bowlders and crunching through the snow along the timber trails. Tears froze on my lashes and I marched as if in a dream. I was escaping from home-life in New England, I was running off to that welcome and beloved war.

"I told the recruiting officer I was eighteen, but I was barely fifteen.

"When he put me through the physical examination I managed to conceal the fact that my trigger finger was missing. I know now that he didn't want to find any flaws. I was accepted as a soldier and within three months I was in battle and running like Hell to save my life."

"You don't mean to tell me you ever ran from the Johnny Rebs?" said father in simulated surprise.

"Sure I ran from them," said Sayer. "And the only reason I ran is because I couldn't fly."

These old jokes were new to us urchins.

Sayer also told how he rode the wheel-horse of a field gun, and one day in action the tide of battle went against them so quickly that the hostlers were rushing the horses to a quick hitch. Young Sayer got his tugs hitched and leaped for his mount. He missed and slid down the horse's side. The Rebel infantry came in sight; the gun was moving.

"Aren't you going to stop and let that man mount?" yelled a gunner pointing to Sayer clinging to his horse's bellyband.

"Hell, no," yelled the officer. "Get out of here!"

Lashing the horses to a gallop the artillerymen clung to the bounding caisson, while the yelling Rebels closed in the pursuit on foot.

"And there I was," said Sayer, "clinging to the tug and back strap like a one-sided saddlebag bouncing against the galloping horse's flank. My strength was being all yanked out, my grip must break in a moment—then the crunch of blood-and-bones under the cannon wheel. Whew! Expect them to stop to save one man's life? Hell, no. The country has plenty more where he came from.

"If I hung on I could be saved, but I couldn't hang on. And if I let go I would be smashed by my own men in their wild retreat. There would be nothing left for the foe to do.

"Not waiting until exhaustion dropped me, I gathered what strength I had and lunging outward I let go. The

wheel grazed me as I fell clear of it. I rolled into the ditch.

"It was full of water.

"The Rebels were coming like a foot-race.

"I tried to rise from the ditch, but my clothes weighed about a ton. I stripped them off like lightning. Then like a buck breaking cover before the hunters I leaped bare and glistening from the ditch and ran down the road.

"What a yell went up when they saw this white rabbit scampering before them. The battle turned into a hunt. I know I saved the lives of hundreds of Union men that day, for the whole Confederate army was shooting at nobody but me. 'Don't let him get away,' they yelled exultingly. 'Head him off, head him off.' It was for all the world like a rabbit hunt in my own Vermont. Boys were shooting a boy. It was sport.

"I passed between two posts where a farm gate had been. The posts turned to splinters as if in salute of me and threw tooth picks all over me. In their eagerness to pot the human rabbit the excited lads were doing the wildest shooting of their careers. Not a bullet touched me. Gradually I outdistanced them. And before night I caught up with my own gun."

"Did you go home after the war?"

"I should say not. Father would have raised too much hell about my breaking the ax."

Sayer was just such a man as Charley Dents, perhaps a little shrewder, and with a humorous slant on his war stories. Neither man knew who his grandfather was; they both remembered their fathers as being ancestry

enough—indeed too much for them—and life on the New England farm so hard that they were glad to escape into the Lincoln army. After demobilization they went West and took up the prairie homesteads that were their rewards.

"When are you going to join Charley Dents' regiment to fight in this war with Chile?" father asked.

"I'll join when they need just one more man and can't get him anywhere else," said Sayer. "I don't see much interest in this war. The papers have got more in them about Sullivan and Kilrain's prizefight. There's something funny about this war."

This commander of the local G.A.R. was not wholly fooled. He was waiting for exciting signs to assure him the country was really at war. Not suspecting a trick, he bided his time, admitting the affair was one too much for him.

Men of the place and the present moment, these Kansans drifted with the grass as the buffalo had drifted with the grass until devoured by guns. Without the background of a philosophy, without historical continuity, how could these men judge whether or not the country was really at war or at peace? The banker and the postmaster and the good-for-nothing editor told them the Chilean war was on. And they could hear the fife and drum at Dents' blacksmith shop where a company of recruits was drilling.

X

WHILE this humorous fantasy was going on in Harrow, born of a trick that a Bradley brain had fathered, my father's mother came to live with us, and she was the most unhumorous lady I have ever known.

"She looks like a lion," my older brothers Johnnie and Wilber reported on the morning after her arrival. She had come in the night while we were asleep. They had peered into her room where she sat before the dressing table combing her hair.

She had long, abundant iron-gray hair, an olive skin and wrinkled, laughing brown eyes. This woman had been a great beauty in her day and all her lines had been magnificent. She was in her sixties and still handsome. Her nose was aquiline and all her features were the remnants of a past perfection. She was a direct descendant of the Pilgrim beauty who was wooed by Standish and John Alden. Her name was Priscilla Alden when she married my grandfather Bradley.

Grandmother Bradley called me "Bub" and I didn't like that. Boys used to hate to be called "Bub" just as black folk hate to be called "nigger." We children all decided that we didn't like Grandmother Bradley and we stuck to that resolve as long as she lived. There was something about her that didn't win us, although she was generous in gifts of money and always told us that we

were the greatest young ones in the world. I never believed it. Being of an inquiring disposition, my question was: How comes it that we are the brightest children in the land? And her answer was that we were descendants of the great John Alden. I often asked her what was it that John Alden had done to make him great. She could never give me an answer.

"Always keep your name before the public," is another thing that Grandmother advised us youngsters.

She believed in getting into the newspapers. Yet here was Captain Charley Dents getting into the Harrow paper with his war on Chile. And my father was terrified at the Frankenstein's monster he had created. He didn't want his name mentioned in connection with this monstrous bastardy.

"Always get your name in the paper," said Grandmother. But if a fool, why cry for the publication of your folly?

This daughter of the Aldens, nearly six feet tall and beautiful in proportion, lovely in the English style, shaped like a figure by Watteau, was reared with a houseful of others by a rural New York preacher. She married a young Scotch-Irish farmer, Oliver Stuart Bradley, more than six feet tall and muscled like a Greek hero. It was his boast in later years that he was the double of General Grant. He was a realist and perhaps I got my strain of realism from him. He was the champion wrestler of Chautauqua county and won the championship by breaking the back of the reigning champion. This tickled his Scotch sense of humor and when he told his grandchildren about it he always had to laugh. The fact that

Oliver Stuart Bradley was the champion wrestler of Chautauqua has since deified him in my eyes. I can see him saying to the Alden tribe—those throwers of Chautauqua —"Follow me, and I will make you throwers of men."

XI

"I THINK it is time to elect a captain now," Dannie Potensky told Charley Dents after the rookies had drilled three days. "I would like to be captain myself, but I ask you, Mr. Dents, in all sincerity who do you think is the best man for the job."

"Well, I always understood that the man that raises a company," said Charley Dents, "is entitled to be captain."

With tantalizing perversity, the young Bohemian argued with him before the whole company of recruits. We Americans had simple, one-track minds. All were amazed, even father, Stan Reynolds and the ragamuffin editor, at the polished and instinctive irony of this young Bohunk. Of course now we know that Europe is an old country and that the art of buffoonery, like the other arts, had gained something there by being practiced more than once. We were a new people, not only a one-track, but a one-time people. We swarmed onto a woodland, felled it, soured the land and moved onto a prairie, plowed it, and were ready if it soured to swarm onto new and sweeter territory.

But here was a Bohemian boy in the new country with an artistry that was old. He was one of the half dozen souls in Harrow knowing that the "Captain" was a fool, his war a farce. So he competed in the election and

forced the Captain to win his glory only by a count of noses among his fools.

John Brown, the literary bum who published the Harrow Daylight (concede his originality in naming his paper) now wrote a ridiculous account in Biblical language of the G. A. R. numskull who raised an army to fight in a war that was non-extant. Also he sent a dispatch to the Kansas City Courier for which he received seven dollars. On the editorial page was a comment on the strange news from Harrow. The paragraph said: "A man named Captain Dents is raising a regiment in Harrow, Kansas, to fight Chile. If he doesn't know that there is no war with Chile, it can only be due to Dents' ignorance."

When this story appeared in the Courier it found its way at once to Charley Dents. There were six outside papers taken in Harrow, five of them being the Kansas City Courier and the other the Cincinnati Inquirer, triweekly edition, my Aunt Annabelle's subscription. Not one of the forty-three G. A. R. men took a paper. Their interest in history, current or past, was done when they had saved the Union and perpetuated it—whether by running naked from the Confederates or what not. The newspaper, announcing that Harrow's war with Chile was a joke and Dents a silly dupe, was handed to Commander Sayer by Casper Case. Case was a Bostonian in the lumber business in competition with my father.

But vengeance was not visited on father, nor on Postmaster Reynolds. Even Dannie Potensky escaped injury. Indeed, Dannie didn't deserve to survive. After the paper had been handed to Captain Dents and he was able to see "in black and white" that it was a hoax, Dannie

Potensky pretended to know nothing about the news and its disillusionment. He went down to Charley's blacksmith shop and, preserving a straight face, began to discuss the war.

The rest of the company, themselves duped but curious, had followed Dannie to the shop.

"You're one of them," cried Dents.

"One of the defenders of my country, yes," said Dannie in patriotic guile.

"It's a joke, it's all a joke," yelled the Captain.

"No," said Dannie. "Dying for one's country is no joke. It is sweet to die for one's country, but it is no joke."

"Get out of here, you foreign son of a —— before I kill you."

The blacksmith was after him with a hammer.

The whole company ran up the street with their furious captain after them. His pride hurt, he was ready to kill them. Beware the fury of the patient and the meek, and he was now furious. They raced through the main street of Harrow. What a spectacle! Father was in the lumber office when he saw the flight of the nation's defenders—pursued by their captain. Postmaster Reynolds looked out and saw the terrible retreat. He realized in a flash that if the common man is insulted he is ready to destroy the world for vengeance.

XII

GRANDMOTHER ALDEN'S advice to get one's name into print under any and all circumstances was here shown fallacious—even to me at the age of nine. For when John Brown's Harrow Daylight came out the next day with his diatribe in Biblical language against the fraudulency of the G. A. R. and the foolishness of Charley Dents in particular, his cleverness in print proved his own ruin in reality.

Ruffians entered the printshop that night and when the second day of the Great Disillusion dawned on Harrow, Editor John Brown found that his type had been strewn from one end of Harrow's main street to the other, and was almost indissolubly mixed with dust and horse manure.

All the next forenoon the angry patriots beheld the patient, poverty-stricken literary man of Harrow picking his type up one by one out of the artless dust of the plains-town thoroughfare.

For hours the village loafers laughed at John Brown fussing among the dunghills to retrieve his type. But finally his pathetic patience woke the cry of human sympathy in them. There is pity in every savage if prevailed upon and the glory of the stupid human is that he has compassion. Animal we are in heart and bowel, save when in pity. And pity moved the patriots at last.

"He ain't such a bad feller after all," said Curley Carpenter, the chief deadbeat of the village.

Dannie Potensky took the crowd mood for a cue and said:

"Fellers, the press is the most powerful booster a town has got. Yonder in the dust lies the newspaper power of our town. It is true that John Brown is a josher from away back, but a man that can't take a joke will never be president."

Now the crowd went out and joined John Brown in trying to pick up the fragments of civilization.

XIII

JOE GEESHAN, our cousin, was visiting us. He was the son of Captain Bass Geeshan; his family had moved to Saddle Rock, Kansas, a region the Captain had marched over as a boy when he joined the Seventh Kansas Cavalry in '61. Joe was not a born fighter like his father, nor was he as much of a fighter as I was. I never bluffed. When the gang arranged a fight for me, I went in and fought sturdily. It was the same simple attitude in which Captain Dents advanced to fight the Chileans. But Cousin Joe blustered and courted a fight with any champion Harrow could produce, and while waiting for a worthy opponent he would tell of the boys he had maimed and almost killed in Saddle Rock.

We took Joe at his word and arranged several fights for him in Harrow. But the poor fellow always got worsted. He had hoped to scare his opponents into quitting. Joe was a bookish boy, not a slugging urchin, and his parents planned to make him the best educated boy in Kansas and eventually the smartest man in America.

Joe's mother, Harriet Alden Bradley, was of course a "direct descendant," but his father, Uncle Bass Geeshan, was of unknown and probably mongrel extraction. We youngsters all admired Uncle Bass. Life hit him hard and he hit back harder. He looked to no future life and no socialist commonwealth whose wizardry would reverse the order of things. He swung out his fist and reversed

things right here. At the age of eight he learned to dread the sound of the dipper scraping on the bottom of the meal bin, for it meant that he and his brother John, a ten-year-old, must go out into that backwoods world of Indiana and by their own wit and grit replenish the food supply. Uncle Bass never saw the inside of a schoolhouse until as a volunteer soldier in the Civil War he bivouacked in Bethel Schoolhouse in Kansas. He had walked from Indiana to volunteer in Kansas because Kansas was long on horses and was sending out nothing but cavalry. Uncle Bass figured that by taking a long walk at the start he could ride the rest of the way through the war. They made a sergeant of him, and when he surprised and captured singlehanded two drunken Confederate officers he was brevetted captain.

Uncle Bass was a tough customer, that's all there was to it. When his regiment was encamped near the home town of some of the men, Captain Bass delighted in kicking those men out of their tents when the wake-up bugle blew. Knowing that they had been up all night with their lady friends and were hence full of a psychological yearning for repose, Bass would be right there to apply the toe of his boot to their pantless thighs, thus furnishing his humor-loving soul some gigantic comedy. After four years of campaigning he came out of the war grinning, a tough and stocky fellow of twenty-two without a friend in the world—and he didn't want any. He stood on his own pegs and he hit every head that showed itself. Having been wounded twice and brevetted captain, he might have had a pension, but needy as he was and greedy as he was, there yet remained one clause in his code of

honor that forbade him to take money for his battle scars, and this is the only good thing I ever heard said of him by any one who knew him.

Harriet Alden Bradley accepted Captain Bass Geeshan because she had become an old maid, and the Captain was her last chance. The courtship of Miles Standish rang the bell that time. The bluff old soldier won the Puritan maid. In their union came together the two strains, shiftless insolence and thrifty audacity, or as she regarded it, blue-blooded wit and barbarian smartness. And their oldest boy, Joseph, was to become the smartest man in the Republic.

"Knowledge is Power!" was being interpreted in Kansas school circles as meaning that Education is a mental club by which the weak can batter down the strong. Education was the magic hatchet with which Jack could slay the Giant.

Joe Geeshan's mother, Aunt Harriet, and my childless relative, Aunt Annabelle, repeated this formula to us children. It was being taught as propaganda by the State University, but I was not old enough to know about the University then. I was in primary school, and one day was amazed to see my Aunt Annabelle enter the classroom followed by the drayman who toted in an enormous chart. It showed the progressive effect of alcohol upon the bibber's liver, heart and stomach. Especially the stomach. There were thirty flaming plates showing the drunkard's stomach at each stage of a thirty days' debauch; from the first fatal glass of beer to the last evening in the barroom when he staggered through the door with delirium tremens.

Aunt Annabelle had become a crusader for prohibition. It had happened suddenly. Having been raised in Wisconsin she had always taken her daily *seidel* of lager beer, but one day when Joe Geeshan was three years old she had given him some beer and he staggered and rolled his weak eye. From that moment she became a prohibition fanatic. An Alden had been made foolish, and the enemy that did it must be fought forever.

The school children and the teacher did not take the drunkard's stomach chart as seriously as did the women that presented it to the cause of education. They were also busy with lobbying a bill through the legislature making the "Drunkard's Fevered Intestinal Chart" compulsory in all primary classes. By rules and regimentation a perfect world was being ordered by the Kansas educationalists. But some of these rules brought me and other delicate children grief from the start to the finish of our school days. One rule was rigidly held to: no child could leave the room within thirty minutes of recess or opening of school. Kansas had not charted her children's internal plumbing as authoritatively as the beer drinker's intestine. . . . In cold weather we sometimes were in agony, an unbearable agony as we watched the merciless wall-clock measure off the absolute thirty minutes of the school law . . . and once, to my acute disgrace, nature asserted herself.

I have talked with many fair and frank people who remember painfully both the passion for rules and regulations and the prudery of their school tyrants. Doctors have told me time and time again that prudery, false modesty and barbaric school rules have made restraint

habitual, causing serious harm, especially to women. . . . Yet there is such reluctance to discuss this simple and yet awful phase of every child's experience in school. . . .

However, when the Puritan was aroused to reform his fellow-man she did not refrain out of delicacy to picture Thirty Days of Beer in a Kansas Boy's Belly. The stupid school law compelled me to humiliation and outlawry. The shame they reduced a tortured child to never could be forgotten.

The next summer it was, that Frank Shepek, illiterate Bohemian farmer, was arrested by constable Charley Dents and taken before city judge Hank Sayer. Saturday had become a day of beer drinking and bologna eating in Harrow. The Bohemian element was constantly increasing, and that rude Kansas hamlet, like proud Charleston, S. C., then and now, had no comfort station. Peasant Frank Shepek had sought the narrow defile between Swede Linder's store and the neighboring Bohemian store and the constable had seen him. He was led before Judge Sayer, veteran of the war that freed the pop-eyed nigger from the lash of white monsters. This venerable liberator fined Shepek five dollars, rather a fortune in those days, and then he and the righteous constable went off and got gloriously drunk on the legal loot.

My aunt Annabelle Elliston lived at the edge of town on a farm that the Bohemian passed on his way home. He stopped and sought her sympathy. Crusading crank that she was, this woman, like all the Aldens, had a certain melting spiritual power.

"Oh, Mrs. Aleck," (Bohemian names end in k), "oh, Mrs. Aleck," he wailed. "They make old Frank Shepek

pay five dollars for—he go between the stores. Oh, Mrs. Aleck. They fine me because I poor Bohemian farmer. Some day I get rich. I go to Harrow. I build a house, people go in and not be see from street. It be gift to America from old Frank Shepek. And on it is painted a sign: 'Dees houses for American and for Bohemian. And dees sign say it in American and say it in Bohemian: 'Peace House!'"

I think often of Grant's words of forgiveness carved on the mausoleum on Riverside Drive.

XIV

GRANDFATHER BRADLEY came to live with us, a tall handsome gray old man with the light of Scotch wit and cunning in his twinkling blue eyes. His ancestor had come to Massachusetts colony in 1640 and the steady urge to the Westward had brought him into Kansas, still surrounded and bedeviled by the mad Puritans. His Alden wife had hectored him on, in the hope that he would become a blatant statesman, a "have saw" Governor of an "I done it" State where she could indulge her histrionic instinct to play the great lady. She still looked like a lion when we boys knew her.

Beautiful as she was, she had always been cold as a snake; she had been acting, acting, all her life. But for an audience in the old 1840's she had nothing but the backwoods farmers of New York, the florid immigrants thronging westward on the Erie Canal, the lumberjacks of Milwaukee, the pioneers in the Wisconsin woods, and later the Iowa clodhoppers, the Nebraska sorghum lappers and finally the nondescripts of this village of four hundred,—Harrow, Kansas.

The York State farmer she had married, Oliver Stuart Bradley, had boasted that he was illiterate. He said his initials, "O. S." stood for "Old Style" Bradley. He could scribble his own name and could read a promissory note and could receipt a bill of sale. Attracted by the physical beauty of Priscilla Alden he wooed her. She

had a college education in a day when there were few women's colleges in the world. She deemed Oliver a yokel and wished to marry another young farmer, a pretentious nincompoop who took a Boston paper and pursued flashy methods in farming.

One of his flash tricks was to raise corn earlier than his neighbors and thus show he was superior to them. His method was to plant the corn on the south slope of a hill. Such a favored location is necessarily small in area, but it gave Ernest Moser the title of "Early Corn Ernest." Such flash appealed to Priscilla Alden and when she was arguing with her father that Ernest was the man for her, she said: "You know, Father, that Ernest always has early corn." "Yes," her father replied, "but Oliver always has late corn." By late corn, he meant that Oliver Stuart Bradley always had corn late in the winter when Ernest Moser was scraping splinters off the bottom of the meal bin and getting "spring poor" as they say of winter-starved cattle.

That old Alden preacher, though he couldn't make a living himself, knew how to advise his daughter to choose a man who could.

And so Grandmother married Grandfather, and he worked harder than ever, enlarging his farm and building a fine house. And they had two children, boys, one of them a remarkably beautiful child.

But when Grandmother had her two handsome little boys and Grandfather's happiness was at its height she dashed it. Another young ne'er-do-well-puritan Yankee farmer wrote sonnets to her, and she left her own man and her two children and went to her romantic lover. He

had no home of his own but lived with his parents, so Priscilla lived with them, too.

"Old Style" Bradley said he would never ask her to come back. But the parents of the poetical man argued with my Grandfather and finally induced him to take her back. He required much persuasion, but they were willing to plead with him a hundred days rather than board his wife a hundred years.

After Priscilla returned to Oliver she nurtured her dream of grandeur in a new way. Illiterate men had been going west and returning as judges, governors and senators from the new states. She urged Oliver to go into the Indian wilderness beyond Lake Michigan and become a governor.

She had soured the sweet flavor of life in the land he grew in, so Oliver sold out and put his family aboard an Erie Canal boat. Amid that lively throng adventuring westward, the beautiful child attracted attention and many remarked that they had never seen his like. These compliments my Grandmother cherished as an actress cherishes early favorable press notices long years after youth has departed. I have heard her repeat these compliments half a century after the child was dead. Both the children were wiped out soon after they settled in Wisconsin.

The Aldens were always "progressive." They did not cling to ancient error as "Old Style" Bradley did. Whatever was new and true they adopted at once. That it was new they could perceive at the time they adopted it—and they found out later whether or not it was true. Grandmother used to tell about a brother of hers who was

setting out some new budded apple trees in Wisconsin—a progressive thing in those days—and a witty young German hunter came by with a green cap and a green feather in it and a decorated rifle made in Nuremburg and he brought the latest information about raising seedless pippins. "If you plant the trees wrong side up," said the educated Dutchman, "all the apples that grow on them will be entirely without cores." The Aldens, having no sense of humor, are always willing to learn "how these things are done in other communities." The seed of Babbitt, priest of Rotary and Kiwanis, was ever in our veins. And this particular Alden took advantage of the new science from Germany of how to grow seedless apples. He planted the little trees with their roots in the air and, sure enough, all the apples that he raised from that planting could be eaten without spitting out the cores.

It was just such Alden progressiveness that took the lives of Priscilla's babies. Neighbors were few and far between in that Wisconsin solitude and Grandfather would sometimes be away from home a week at a time, for if a neighbor twenty miles away had a house-raising, it took a day to walk there and a day to come back. Grandmother used always to smell his breath when he came back, fearing that he had enjoyed a drink of whisky. I can see how the Eighteenth Amendment was in our system long before the Constitution was born.

One time when Grandfather was away, a stranger came to the Bradley cabin. He was a charlatan offering a patent medicine that would cure every known disease. It would cure the drink evil, tobacco addiction and worms. Grandmother had once knocked Grandfather's pipe stem

down his throat with the cry: "Damn your old tobacco habit."

Grandmother always had the "tisic," that is, the galloping consumption; it galloped through her system for eighty-six years. She bought a bottle of the faker's dope. The Aldens always welcome new truth; they are always on the firing line of advanced thought and sometimes they get shot to pieces by it. Priscilla took a swig of the nostrum and it seemed to "benefit" her. What is good for the goose is good for the goslings. She gave some of the dope to her two little children, healthy though they were. Soon they became very sick. Ah, sickness in the family! How fortunate that she had medicine in the house! She gave the children a real dose of the medicine this time, and dosed them until they were dead!

Grandfather was away on a butchering bee. He was an expert butcher and meat cutter, as he was indeed expert in every line of husbandry—and his pioneer neighbors all sought his services at butchering time. He was returning to his cabin singing a folk song with the refrain:

"Forty days of butchering and never cut a gut."

And the beautiful Priscilla stood in the cabin door smiling to greet him. He was still proud of his wife: for her beauty was like an epaulette upon the shoulder of a captain. But the two children were the lead-strings of his heart. When he asked where his babies were, she told him of the tragedy in the bare terms of a commonplace inevitable happening. Quietly he set to the business of burying the little bodies in the front yard. Then

he piled a few of his belongings in a blanket and trudged sixty miles to the landing which is to-day Milwaukee.

He had uttered no word of reproach, though declaring dryly enough, "This time 'Old Style' Bradley is leaving you for keeps and you can stay in the Wisconsin woods until the wolves eat you."

He was returning to dear old York state, done with pioneering and an errant wife. He waited at the sawmill landing for the boat. When it finally arrived he found that the disembarking passengers were a number of his old neighbors from Chautauqua coming west to try their fortunes. These naïve folk at once concluded that 'Old Style' had come to the landing to receive them. He fancied the fiction, liking very much the notion of shining in their eyes as the hardened woodsman and becoming their leader.

Imagine grandmother's surprise to see him return, leading, victoriously, a "passel" of new neighbors. She had been brooding all alone in the cabin for days, believing the wolves would devour her.

xv

IN school I learned faster than the other children for I was older than they. I had started when seven years old and the other pupils began at five and six years of age. Being older than my classmates, which meant being behind my proper class, burned deeply and shamefully into my spirit. . . . I am now forty-five, and yet I still have dreams and nightmares in which the sense of terror takes its basis from my being behind my class . . . I have been kept out of school and am trying to re-enter and catch up (in my dreams), and it is hopeless and the agony of it wakes me . . .

My Aunt Annabelle was always finding flaws in the teachers and in the textbooks. I liked the teachers, they were good ones, and my sympathy was with them when I learned that Aunt Annabelle and father were forever filing complaints with the School Board. Aunt Annabelle got my father elected to the School Board so she could have a whip-hand over the teachers. She always used to say: "The Aldens are born teachers." She had been a school-teacher herself in Wisconsin when she was fourteen. Little schooling had she enjoyed when she undertook to teach. Many of her German pupils were big boys of seventeen and they knew much more than she did. These German pupils would explain the difficulties in

the textbooks to the perplexed teacher. One of a number of short quotations in the school reader was:

"Give me liberty or give me death."—Patrick Henry.

This American teacher was so ignorant that she did not understand that Patrick Henry was merely the author of the line. She taught her pupils to read it:

"Give me liberty or give me death, Patrick Henry."

The older pupils explained that Patrick Henry was an American orator imploring liberty and not a tyrant from whom liberty was implored. As I look back, I can believe that the reason Aunt Annabelle was forever after seeking flaws in the work of good teachers was to salve her sore memories of what a bad teacher she had been.

Among the faults in the textbooks pointed out by Aunt Annabelle was the instance of Ethan Allen taking Ticonderoga. The text reported Allen as saying to the British commander: "Surrender in the name of Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress." What he really said, according to my aunt's version, was: "Come out of there you damned old rat!"

Also, the book said in recounting the crisis at the battle of Buena Vista, where the Mexican general sent word to General Taylor asking the Americans to surrender, the answer was: "Taylor never surrenders." Aunt Annabelle professed to know that what he really said was: "Tell him to go to hell."

I was in full sympathy with these new and true versions. They sounded to me like the utterances of men. I wanted to be a man. I didn't want to see other men

emasculated by the Puritan totem, because I didn't like it when they emasculated me. I have always written like a man. The reader who peruses my works would fancy me as tough hickory with the shell bark on. My brother Tom writes the same way. But when Brother Tom once appeared, reporting for duty on a job he had secured by letter, the employer took one look at him and fired him. "I cannot believe that you are the same man that wrote these letters," he said. And I, when writing mountaineer humor for a New York paper was challenged to a fight because I had kissed another man's girl on Broadway. When the outraged fellow saw me he forgave me at once. "I thought from your writings," he apologized, "that you were about seven feet tall, with enough hair on your chest to make a mattress. I'll buy you a good dinner. And you can kiss my girl any time you want to. I'll never get jealous of a competitor like you."

All in all, my boyhood on father's farm at the edge of Harrow village was a happy one. There were rabbits to chase with dog and gun, there were bumblebees to fight. Once I stunned a number of bumblebees with an iron paddle by hitting the clover heads where they worked. I put them in my pocket. Later I took them out and was tearing their abdomens for the honey sac, doing it as one cracks nuts for the kernel, and the automatic reflex of a beheaded bee sunk its poison dagger into my thumb. I yelled and cursed in boyish rage, but realized amid my outcry that I was a bad sport. This dead bee had inflicted pain upon me and I should have bowed to its postmortem victory, remembering that our religious heroes had always stung their enemies after death.

I had been a believer in Christ's sermon on the mount as taught in the public school. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall obtain peace," was one beatitude that I tried to put in practice. That evening when two boys were trying to work up a fight by cursing each other I had attempted practical Christianity. "Don't swear like that around here," I said, assuming the rôle of peacemaker. "Who in hell says so," they both yelled, jumping for me. I ran, realizing that these Christian precepts didn't fit into the facts of life in Harrow.

I say my boyhood was happy, for it is normal for the soul of youth to pass its period of gestation in the womb of dreamland. As you see, some glimmerings of reality constantly came to me. When I was eight years old I was eating a big lump of home-made taffy when I met a boy of my own age with an inflated bladder which he had got at the village slaughter house.

I offered to trade my candy for the bladder.

He said: "Maybe I don't like your candy." But I was sure that any boy liked candy.

"Let me taste the candy," he suggested, "and I'll soon tell you whether I'll trade."

I gave him the candy and he ate it judiciously. I knew he was enjoying it. When he swallowed it he forced a frown and brazenly declared that he had not liked the candy and would not trade his bladder for it.

In a flash I realized that some boys were born foxy, and I was not one of them. I would have to learn by conscious cerebration to do tricks that this boy could do by instinct. It took me thirty-two years to override my tribal

instincts and let the mainspring of my acts be human cunning.

Still my childhood was happy, for I was a secret poet, storing the treasure of memories of the prairie conquest and the legends and lies of the recent great war to free the black multitudes. . . . At an early age I put down the songs and snatches gleaned from a soldiers' reunion. . . . Our time was a running rhythm of recollection of the civil conflict and in these lines I remember the sayings and songs of the surviving hosts:

We cross the prairies as of old our fathers crossed the sea
To . . . hang old Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree,
Shouting the battle cry of freedom.
So, shoo, fly, don't bother me, I belong to Company B;
I's goin' back to Dixie . . . with the flag that makes you free.
In my old Kentucky home, so far away.

Just before the battle, mother, I am thinking most of you,
And . . . that sweet little girl, that pretty little girl,
The girl I left behind me.
For I'm Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,
I feed my horse good hay and beans,
I spark the young girls in their 'teens,
While we were marching through Georgia.
I bought a rooster for fifteen cents,
Good-bye, my lover, good-bye;
The son-of-a-gun flew over the fence,
Good-bye, my lover, good-bye.
Oh, my darling Nellie Gray, they have taken you away.
And . . . I march along mit Schlegel in der deutsche companie.

I saw a German regiment step out as on parade,
They marched across the open where a hundred cannon played;
They fell like wheat, they came not back;
At night our bugles played;
But there was no German regiment attached to our brigade!

We are tenting to-night on the old camp ground;
And how the darkies shouted when they heard the joyful sound!
John Brown of Osawatomie, he made our soil free;
And massa's in the cold, cold ground.
The union forever—hurrah, boys, hurrah!
Cheers for the living, flowers for the dead.
Under the lilies the blue, under the roses the gray,
We here highly resolve that these honored dead
Shall not have died in vain.
The earth grows green again with grass and carnage is forgotten.

XVI

FATHER was forever challenging men to humiliate him and then dying a thousand deaths at the humiliation. Away back in Wilber in his poker-playing days, not long after he had fled home coatless after losing his overcoat in wager, he had been abashed by a humiliation which never erased its branding tattoo from his soul. It seems that mother, left alone in the little square shack with three children sleeping in the room where Annie Dempsey died, and another fœtus eating the salient, healthy juices of her diminishing blood, had awakened from a hideous midnight nightmare, and seizing me, who was the baby then, had run through the Nebraska snows, bare legged, clad only in her chemise, to the grain office where her man was to be found.

Father never forgave her for shaming him by that semi-naked apparition in the cloudy hours of the poker game.

He never thought of the insane terror torturing this guileless, girlish body. He thought only of his own dismay when the shrewd poker players twitted him of it ever after. And father held this defeat against her for months, glowering hatefully at her for having laid him open to ridicule.

My people were the bad sports of their race. When their brothers outranked them in England, they refused to play, and they went to another place, an inferior un-

tamed land where they could at least outrank the poor benighted savages. This was the same spirit that made the New Englanders hate the Southerners. For the Southerners outranked them in wit, artistry and a fearless appetite for life, a natural taste for reality and good living. Aunt Annabelle told me this; she had flashes of true prophecy. In a liberal mood she ridiculed the Aldens: "We used to sing hymns against the South," she said, "claiming we Aldens would be glad to have

> . . . no sugar in our tea,
> If only by our sacrifice the Negro can be free."

It was awful poetry, she said, but here was a worse one:

> "Let the question now before us be decided by the sword,
> For we never can have peace till our dear Union is restored."

Such senseless savagery now appalled her; she shuddered at the very burlesque of it in Captain Dents and his regiment. Grandfather Bradley had been like that. He was an Andrew Jackson Democrat, that is, a man of the frontier without aristocratic lineage but with all the imperious qualities of a true aristocrat. When the Civil War came about, grandfather refused to side with the reformers. He said: "If God couldn't make the negro white, I'm sure that I can't do it." Then he shut up and went on about his business. . . . This Aunt Annabelle told us, was true sense.

In dream language they were crying for murder while in reality the Aldens were chicken-hearted.

Aunt Annabelle was the woman who taught me liberalism and told me to be the poet of my tribe. Yet she went instantaneously fanatic herself on seeing a young Alden stagger from the beer he had supped from her own stein. With ax and firebrand she smashed and destroyed saloons in Harrow and led the disheveled Amazons who poured the beer and whisky in the street to "save our boys."

XVII

WHEN I was ten years old I contracted walking typhoid-malaria and dragged myself about for half a year while irreparable damage was being done to my insides. Life became a dream and all my comrades were fantastic figures. Mere chemistry had changed my nature. I could not learn my lessons but recited strange absurdities. The fields that I had wandered in since babyhood became a strange country, all the values that I had learned were lost and I was wanderingly sick in a wizard's land. Gradually I came back to life and the old meanings returned to me. But this experience showed how a mild, self-generated poison can transmute life's golden metal into worthless dross. It was a foretaste of what awaited me in the years of my young manhood. It explains the dream life that my brother Tom was fogged in for so long, and which engulfed my brilliant father in the end.

While weak and anæmic from the insidious malaria, I was doing my evening chore of putting the baby, Arthur, to bed. This was the seventh of the living infants, the ninth in all, and he was the handsomest. While I was undressing him trying to put him to bed he kicked so hard that I couldn't get his shoes off. Utterly weary I let the baby conquer me; I flung myself beside it and cried.

"Why, what are you crying for, Roy?" my mother asked. "Did the baby hurt you?"

"No," I blubbered. "But I can't undress him. I know I shall never be able to make a living."

"Why do you say that?" There was a note of alarm in her voice, for my mother was an intelligent woman.

"Because papa always says I'll never be able to make a living," I sobbed. "He says I don't know enough to pound sand in a rat hole. Now I know it is true. If a baby can beat me, how can I beat the world?" I had given up; I was a quitter. Malaria had turned my blood to water, and I was just verging on the period of adolescence. I had glanced into the future, facing all of life's problems at once, and they were too much for me.

The maternal heart of my mother snarled. "John," she cried at my father. "You shall never browbeat that child again." She picked me up and kissed me. Even the baby seemed to turn sympathetic, for he lay quiet and let me undress him. Thirty years later that baby came into the story again, in one of the sweetest episodes —one of the rarest moments that I have ever tasted. . . . But my father laughed with satiric enjoyment of my childish woe. His sense of humor was the queerest.

That fighting flash from my mother settled the case with me. I had a friend. Somebody knew that I could make a living. I knew it, too, now. The only one that didn't know it was my father. And he should learn. How pleased he would be when I should show him that I was a worthy son.

Well, I showed him that I was a worthy son—of such a father. I showed him I had all the donkey traits that

he had, in fact, I became more asinine than he, if that were possible. I inherited all his cussedness and in the end came back and laid it on him like a crown. I was a hard laugher then, and I laughed at his futility as he had laughed at mine.

XVIII

"JOHN, you'll have lots of help," the farmers used to greet father when he was running the State Bank of Harrow and came up out of our cellar home with four small boys at his heels. Later when he had built the big house the roll numbered six boys and a girl. . . . Lots of help for farming. (He had sold the bank and now carried on a large farm with the aid of Uncle Matthew and Aunt Annabelle.)

Of course father really needed no help from his lime-sapped rickety brats. He was rich, and could have afforded to help them by buying green vegetables to cure their scurvy. But he wanted help, and he plowed under their characters and garnered their strength and sweetness unto himself, even as these children had sapped their mother's blood.

I made a good workman on his farm. I mean I did all I could, for I was obedient. Brother Tom, an elfin soul intangible to touch, was hard to drive. But I was always ready to do my best. But it was not good enough. As a plowman I was clumsy. Father would yell: "Turn out and quit. Don't you see you ain't half plowing that?" . . . The ground was so hard I couldn't do better, but I would plead: "I'm doing the best I can."

"You're a fool, God damn you; unhitch and turn out."

The greatest comfort I found was in sharing agonies

with poor tortured Tom and fraternizing with him in poetic dreams.

At the age of eight he had been writing Poesque poems with the mournful note of old despair. A sample shows his artistry:

"As when amid the desert waste the weary caravan
Enfolds its form in darkness and is never seen by man,
So my youth and high ambitions vainly died as they began. . . ."

It was a mad mixture of Bible, ballad and current bombast milling in the lad's mind.

At ten Tom had learned a smattering of Italian. God knows how he picked it up in that land of Bohemian farmers. And he told me solemnly that within a year he would be leading a revolt in Italy and would make that country a republic like our own. This is racial, this urge to pick up the mud-folk and make them over in our own image. God had that habit. The Puritan believes he is God. I was more of a realist. I saw that Tom was a ridiculous oaf.

At raking hay and hoeing corn he was a vexation to father; for Tom would rake the hay into military trenches defending Spain for the Moors instead of planning his windrows with a view to keeping them out of the gullies so the loaders could park their wagons easily; or he would lean his hoe against a cornhill and leave me to work alone while he would search the gully willows all day for a wild canary's egg.

Thus is beauty born of rickets; his limeless blood cry-

ing for lime became a search for the singing canary. Tom and I used to work overtime in the after-supper light, to hoe and tend the kitchen garden mother set out. But always the vegetables were eaten up by father's hogs. Father would answer mother's outcry with the dictum: "The hogs are worth more than the garden."

But Tom and mother and I, alone, would whisper together: "But are the hogs worth more than the hogs and the garden both?" But secretly; for we feared the tyrant. And we feared him because we lacked the lime to fight him.

Mother, being Pennsylvania German, had an instinct for alimentation that told her to cleave to cabbage and turnips as the hart panteth for the sweet running water brooks. Father was Massachusetts Puritan and that tribe is born without the Simian instinct for the proper forage. Lacking that monkey instinct and never having replaced it by man's reason, they never learned to calm their colons with a mess of herbage, but let their alimentary ills run riot in that fever dream called World Reform.

And the Puritan who once dreamed of a free world and sang that he would sacrifice all sweets to free the negro was now battling to enslave his own brown, pumpkin-headed child.

At eighteen that poetic lad was still a gnome or nothing. Thorn and batwing were his sword and buckler, and through the air he rode on thistledown. His fancies delighted me and I built my cruder rhymes about them. In a land where art is, he would have been coddled as a genius, but on a Kansas corn-and-hog ranch fools find life a tragedy.

Our thrifty father cursed him for his incompetence, although it was through Father's Yankee blood that Tom had inherited a mind at odds with reality.

God, how I loved that boy. How I grieved that the stones of fact rent his bleeding flesh . . . and that he could not know what wounded him.

Secretly I nourished a dream to be a poet, too. Tom lived in a mystic vastness. I walked with our own people in the narrow furrows . . . charmed by their pithy talk, homely images and tart witticisms. Before the fright of inferiority found me, I saw myself as the Homer of the prairie pioneers and fashioned this kind of verse:

A COLUMBUS OF THE PRAIRIE

Sodcorn Jones was a wise old pill,
Planted seven kernels in a sodcorn hill;
Folks all told him, "You're a gol' darn dunce,
Sod isn't conquered when it's just plowed once."
They all planted pumpkin vines, he tried corn,
Gosh, what a crop he raised, sure's you're born,
And the cornstalk fiddle played a tune so grand,
That we all started dancing in a sodhouse land.

Let's build a silo near the old man's bones,
And say, "Here's a monument to Sodcorn Jones."

XIX

"For each man steals what hogs he can,
By all let this be heard;
Some do it with their threatening talk,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword."

GRANDFATHER BRADLEY gave each of us Bradley children a silver dollar minted in the year of our birth. Mine was of 1881.

"I am an old man whose work is done," he had said as he handed us children the tokens. "I have won life's poker game and these are the chips. Always keep these dollars as mementoes of your own birthdays and of your old granddad who loved you."

Who then was this man who gave us each a dollar, when our own father had never given us a dime?

Oliver Stuart Bradley was descended from the Stuart clan of Scotland, a man of mighty physique and gentle spirit. Little is known of his immediate family save that his father was a vigorous, thrifty New York farmer who left wide lands and a big dwelling house to his eight children. He had built this great mansion to be the homestead of the family he had founded. And back of him, there is a tradition that his grandfather had also built a great hall in Massachusetts and had founded a

family. Doubtless this trait can be traced back to ancestor after ancestor. Founding a family runs in our family.

Oliver Stuart Bradley was the youngest but one of the sons of Farmer John Clark Bradley who had built that great house in York State where all his children were to live when they should have married and brought their wives home to Bradley Hall. But the sons were careless and dissolute—one was a gambler and one a gifted bar-room singer. Young Oliver Stuart stayed at home and carried on the farming operations while the older brothers consumed the estate. One day, after a night of great losses at the gaming table, the elder brother, Willard Bradley, drove in a buggy out into the field where Oliver Stuart, nineteen and without education, was sweating at the plow. The dissipated one, in his fine clothes and luxurious carriage, all mortgaged—which the other boy was toiling to pay for—pointed his buggy whip at the worker and began telling him how to improve his work so as to yield better revenues. Oliver Stuart removed the lines from his shoulders, draped them over the plow handles, and going toward his elder brother received the whip lash across his face. He went on and thrashed Willard unmercifully, then he put on his coat, and leaving his brother lying on the grass and the team standing at the plow, he went through a gap in the hedge fence and continued walking forty miles. That was the last he saw of his family and he never communicated with them by letter. Indeed at that time he could not write a letter. It was after he met and married Priscilla Alden that he learned the rudiments of literature.

He had taken root in Chautauqua county and was thriv-

ing there when the escapade of his romantic wife wrenched him from the soil and acting on her suggestion they removed into the wilds of Wisconsin. A gypsy fortune teller had told Priscilla that she would have seven children, three boys and four girls, and that all of the boys would die in infancy. She believed it; she put the same unfaltering faith in this piece of witchcraft that she put into the acceptance of each new scientific revelation and mechanical discovery, which in those days were almost yearly revolutionizing American life. When she poisoned her two sons to death by filling them with some unknown nostrum, she believed that the first part of the gypsy's prophecy had been fulfilled. In the Wisconsin woods the four apocalyptic daughters were born and after them another son, my father. Priscilla "never expected to raise that child," she said, for the gypsy had told her that all her sons were to die in infancy. Now this woman was not a believer in any orthodox religion, in fact she was an infidel laughing at the Christian legend as a "senseless and comical superstition." She was a "free mind" like her daughter Annabelle after her,—believing in free love and having practiced it, and curling an ironic lip at every old belief when it was challenged by a new one. Yet she believed that a gypsy woman could foretell the unknown future down to the last and utmost syllable of unuttered Destiny. Account for such a mentality? Purely racial, just as a buzzard knows a way to soar all effortless on the impalpable breezes where a lark must ever flap his wings or fall.

Priscilla Alden Bradley was as faithless a mother as she was wife; and when her last son was born, remember-

ing the gypsy's prophecy she made slight effort to save him. She evidently felt that it would be a waste of labor to bestow much care on a child that was not destined to survive. She was only waiting for him to curl up and die so she could tie his hands together across his little body and call in the neighbor women to help her mourn. And that is what happened in the child's first desperate illness. Before he was cold and rigid she laid him out and tied his crossed hands, and while the carpenter was making the coffin she was holding a *soirée* of grief with the Dutch neighbor women gathered as an audience. They say her lament for her last son was as eloquent as the stage version of David's lament for Absalom. It had a hard note in it, a Boston literary note that did not chime well in the warm-milk bosoms of the *hausfraus*. One of them picked up the cold, naked body of the child and said: "I do not believe he is dead." And cutting the strings from the blue wrists, she took the corpse in warm embrace and mothered him back to life.

At a later time grandfather himself was stricken with heart failure and was pronounced dead. He lay on a bier two days with no sign of life and then life returned. This strange relationship with death may point to similarities between my father's temperament and Poe's.

Grandfather planted ten acres of corn. At that time no farmer had ever raised more than an acre or two, and the tending of ten acres of corn was a farm undertaking as enormous in its way as the Brooklyn bridge or the Panama Canal was in engineering. His pioneer Wisconsin neighbors said he was crazy to plant so much corn. They declared that there was not enough men and horses

in the state to consume ten acres of corn. At another time when he had an immense field of wheat, the harvesters, regarding him as a rich man decided to rob him. The wheat was dead ripe, and if not cradled at once, would shatter, that is, fall to the ground and lose its kernels in the dirt. So the cradlers formed a union and agreed that none would cut his grain unless he hired them all at twice the ruling wage for harvesters. I have said that Grandfather was of Scotch blood.

He told the men: "You wish to rob me because you think I will pay twice what the work is worth. But I will not pay it. I will cut enough myself for my own bread and the part that rots will be the bread you yourselves would be buying next winter. The more this wheat costs to cut, the higher will be your bread. If you will not cut this wheat for the regular wage, gentlemen, I bid you good afternoon."

They went ahead and cut the wheat. These are the men that made the state of Wisconsin, a state that is forever wailing that the rich are not brotherly, and combine to rob the honest farmer. Grandmother, being a liberal, sympathized with these clever farmers who tried to rob their neighbor because he was a bigger farmer than they. She always hated him for his strength, his magnanimity, his success. She brought her four daughters up to despise their father as a "reactionary," a man who was as dense as a bullock, who lacked the intellect to assimilate a progressive idea.

Their household was slovenly, the mother an incompetent housekeeper. Half the time she lay abed waiting for consumption to finish her. She would dress a lot of

fowls and then keep them till they stunk before she cooked them. While she was reading progressive literature her bread always ran over in rising and was sour and rancid when she baked it. As soon as the oldest daughter, Harriet, was big enough, she did the housework. (Aunt Harriet mothered Joe Geeshan, the smartest man in America.)

The next oldest, my aunt Annabelle, the prophet and prohibitionist, was a shirk, and when Harriet called her to wipe the dishes, she would hide behind the gooseberry bushes and pretend she did not hear the call to duty. She is the one who became a flaming social revolutionary claiming that the rich evaded their duties toward the poor.

My father was the baby and was petted by the four sisters. He was never disciplined in his life. He did whatever he pleased and when he made an impudent remark his sisters laughed. He worshiped his father, and, as in those days little boys did not eat at the "first table" with the farmer and his hired hands but waited for the second table, he always claimed the privilege of sitting at his father's place and eating from his father's used plate. One day he came in late and the dishes had been washed. He demanded his father's dirty plate. To eat out of a clean dish was equal to asking him to accept disinheritance.

Father wanted us to invest grandpa's silver dollars. He considered keepsakes silly. "Buy little pigs," he said, "and let them grow into great hogs, and thus remember the Bradley family. Dollars in the cupboard will never grow; they will only tarnish."

And much as it rasped our sensibilities to spend the coins that Grandfather had told us to keep forever, we

children took father's advice, or rather, obeyed his command when mother said the good man must be obeyed. From a neighbor we purchased two pigs with the four sacred coins (birthrights of Johnny, Wilber, Tom and me) and father raised them and fattened them for us, and sold them and kept the money.

"Each man steals what hogs he can;
By all let this be heard;
Some do it with their threatening talk;
Some with a flattering word;
The coward does it with a kiss;
The brave man with a sword."

Father stole our hogs with a kiss. I do not complain. I forgive him. This man who had once been dead, with his baby hands tied on his chest, and was nursed back to life by the warmth of a stranger's breasts, lived to steal one son's pig and devour the other's marrow.

XX

UNCLE BASS as an orphan boy was robbed aplenty by Yankee farmers. Little wonder he hated and despised the agriculturists. He called them "damned sorghum lappers." They were too poor to have butter and so molasses was the spread for their corn bread. It was a "new country," a hard and sterile land for lack of rain. The newcome settlers were the kind that just naturally inhabit such lean acres—rag-tag Yankees crowded off the fat lands by their lustier kinsmen . . . bewildered Bohemians . . . Germans from the cobbles of Bremen and Hamburg who had braved the West in the hope of becoming Junkers. Here they were grouped by chance in the waste about Saddle Rock, Kansas.

In the days of his war enlistment young Geeshan had liked the looks of grassy Kansas and thither he returned as a civilian and became a hog buyer. He knew how to put his boot toe under a plank and pry up the scales, so he could steal one hog out of every ten he bought. At least he told me this and I believed it, although it may have been his joking way of showing his contempt for the Kansas farmers. I know that often a farmer would question his weights, and Bass would swear terribly and frighten the poor hind into submission. On occasion Bass smote them to the ground.

And when a farmer was so downed with a fist blow he

merely wept like Frank Shepek when fined five dollars for answering a call of nature.

The young Captain Bass scored off these people easily. He was their banker (as my father was in a similar community) lending them money for seed corn and buying the corn on speculation. He sold lumber, and they built houses in place of their mud huts. In the expanding years he lent them money on farm notes and in the years of panic he foreclosed and became a great land-owner.

Captain Geeshan was much older than my Aunt Harriet Alden Bradley, but what is more significant, utterly different, he being a masterful barbarian who did not know nor care who his grandfather had been. He had no silver dollar memento of a Scotch Gross Father. Aunt Harriet was an Alden of the Aldens, and the tradition of her strain is that none of them had ever been able to make a living. They thought it was clever of them. A *self-kidder* (American for self-deluders) always elevates his faults into a sanctified virtue. They used to tell how old Noah Alden, the Revolutionary veteran, who was always getting into the debtors' prison, used to get himself released from jail by making oath that "I own no property of any kind anywhere"—and he used to add gratuitously, "And I never expect to." This was wit. I can see my grandmother wrinkle her nose with laughter as she told it. But I saw nothing funny in the incompetence and imbecility.

My father had implanted the terror in my heart that I too was so idiotic that I would never be able to make a living. This is the demon that makes all Americans rich men or mad men. The Aldens were a non-ac-

quisitive crew, with a compensatory gift of wit,—as they imagined. I could never see any point to their wit, and as for their non-acquisitiveness, they would steal a hog as quick as the next man if they found the hog guarded only by a child.

When it came to taking bacon from men of their own size they did not offer to pass blows, they wanted to pass laws. In other words, a magic formula must steal pork for them.

"You are a direct descendant," my dear old Grandmother used to tell me. "You are of the chosen line. Always get your name in the paper. Let the world know you are a direct descendant of John Alden."

When I was eighteen I discovered that my learned Grandmother was a bigger fool than I. A pail of cream which I was lowering into the well to keep it cool fell into the water when the string that held it parted. "Hell," I exclaimed. "There goes the cream. And worse still, the well water will be polluted. That's what comes of using old rotten cord." Grandmother always saved old junk and insisted on its being used after its usefulness was gone. Such was the rotten string that she had given me to suspend the cream pail with. The pail had no lid on it.

"Now, wait a moment," said the grand old lady. "No use crying over spilt cream. It may not be lost after all. Let's look into the philosophy of it. Which is heavier?—cream or water? The water is the heavier. Therefore it will pour over the cream bucket as it sinks and will hold the cream in the bucket. Isn't that right? Sure, that's

right. All you'll have to do is descend into the well and salvage the cream intact."

"Good God, Grandmother," I exclaimed hotly. "After sixty-five years of experience on the farm do you have to go back to Euclid and your college algebra to figure out whether the cream is spilt when it falls in the well? Any fool knows it from experience. Has experience taught you nothing? I can shut my eyes and see that cream pour out of the sunken bucket and rise to the top of the water. It rose to the top of the milk, didn't it? The milk being heavier didn't hold the cream down, did it? That's the trouble with your theoretical reasoning, you always get the wrong answer. Yet any fool knows the right answer from experience."

In the fifteen years that I knew Priscilla Alden Bradley she never said a sensible thing. Grandfather told me that she had never said a sensible thing in all her life. When I knew her she took the Boston Transcript and the Atlantic Monthly and a weekly reprint of the best philosophical writings in Britain and she kept abreast of all the current literary movements and every new thought—especially the new thought—and yet she knew nothing. Grandfather said she was just a beautiful dummy, not always kind to him. Yet he loved her and had put up with her and had been led a dog's life by her. It is a way of our American men.

Grandmother was always gay and optimistic; she had no grudge against anybody in the world. She spent her summers making futile gardens wherever she could find a bit of sterile soil, land that had no grass or weeds on it because it was unsuited to plant life. When winter came

she would hibernate in bed until spring. She had one lung, having been tubercular for fifty years. Tuberculosis produces a toxin which makes one happy, confident and friendly toward all the world, as does an infusion of caffein. What a pity that all the Puritans didn't have tuberculosis . . . "sovereign alchemist that in a trice, life's leaden metal into gold transmutes."

XXI

IT was the Alden in Aunt Harriet that made her suggest to her strong-fisted Captain that education was the magic formula that would make their son a wizard. Education was the club by which a weakling could enforce his will upon an unarmed world.

Crafty, illiterate old Uncle Bass agreed, and little Joe's march to know-it-all-ness began.

Often enough a boy's parents make this resolve for him —decide that they will educate him until he is the smartest man in America, but the plan is balked by the boy.

Not so with Joe Geeshan, however; he voted "yes," and for thirty-five years they had him training rigorously for the title. Heavy-weights have sweated for months in a barn gymnasium preparing for the fistic championship; cousin Joe Geeshan sweated away half his normal lifetime educating himself to be the champion smart-aleck of the United States. He was to demonstrate the Kansas theory that education is magic.

I had admired Cousin Joe and feared him, as a boy, because his wit was quick, like my father's tongue and every time either of them flecked me with his wit he brought blood. Aunt Harriet, Joe's mother, had told me he was destined to be the smartest man in America and to subdue the world by his educated wit. I did not doubt it.

Joe had been rather a sickly child, as Cæsar and Napoleon had been before him. His eyes were gummed

up; and to open them some medication and slight surgery were required. But by the time he was ready for public school he was hitting on all cylinders and his parents left the Wilber ranch and moved into Saddle Rock, Kansas, a town some forty miles from Harrow. When he was in the third grade he told his school teacher that he was "descended from the courtship of Miles Standish." His mother treasured his childish *bon mot* as a rocket flare of wit, and wrote it down for use in his biography. Joe never wrote his autobiography and so I am doing it for him.

Education was the grindstone on which Alden smartness was to be sharpened into deadliness. Education is the one thing that the Mayflower descendants have promoted. They would sell their shoes any time to further its lofty purposes. They built colleges in a string through the wilderness before they built roads. Their first dollar went to found a university and their second dollar to put a roof over their own heads. How comes it that a tribe who had no other generous quality was the giver of American enlightenment? Because they were born teachers, militant teachers, the kind that orders other people's lives. Their "education" was not really education, but tribal propaganda. The Pilgrims were teachers instead of soldiers, because the man whom a soldier takes the bayonet to, is himself armed with a bayonet, but a teacher uses a snob-club on helpless intimidated mentalities. The man who indulges in "education" satisfies an appetite, the appetite to ram his tyranny down his fellow citizen's throat. Because the Pilgrims had stomachs they robbod the red man's corn cribs, and it was theft. The

Pilgrims had land lust; they killed the Indians for his acres, and that was murder. The Pilgrims had opinions; they rammed them down the throats of their victims, and that was education. And so remain these three, Robbery, Murder and Education, and the greatest of these is Education.

XXII

DURING the Easter holiday I went on a bicycle tour and reached the town where my grandmother lived, the Pennsylvania Dutch one who whipped mother for not going to prayer meeting.

As usual a broken-down preacher was sharing the hospitality of her roof. I had to bunk with this brother, who had a sliding eye and had been a missionary from Mud Springs, Oklahoma, to the lily land of the Smiling-Eyed Philosophers. But his mission had been a failure because the coolie Chinks were more interested in the erratic performance of his sliding eye than in the glad tidings he had brought from Oklahoma. So I slept that night with the man with the evil eye. He asked me how my soul was and what church I attended. I said that my soul was just fine and that I attended the Baptist church as my good grandmother had taught me to.

"What? The Baptist church?" he cried and rolled to the far corner of the bed as if I had told him I had the small-pox.

"I mean Presbyt—the Unit—er—whatever in hell church she belongs to." I was angry that he had led me into a pitfall. Of course it was my own fault for not having been sly enough to inform myself on these matters. I always fly into a rage when my imbecility is uncovered.

The missionary was silent for some time. Then he

asked me if it was possible that I did not know that my grandmother was a Methodist. I had never paid any attention to such things. "What kind of an American are you?" he gasped. He lay there groaning in the dark and I imagine that his sliding eye was sparkling and gyrating like a whirling pin-wheel. Here was a white Protestant American who did not know about the Methodist Church and its Americanism. But I had turned over and gone to sleep. . . .

There was little enough religion in our home. Father always worked on Sunday, as he made all the rest of us work, although we coveted rest if not religion. One Sunday he was building a chimney, a neighbor came over and said: "They tell me that it is against the law to work on the Sabbath."

"They tell you that, do they?" father asked ironically. "Well, you tell them that I told you that if they will come over here and give me this information by direct word of mouth I will be glad to kill them with this hatchet!" He glared, rolled his eyes, gurgled horribly and swung the hatchet about his head. Father was a shrewd humorist. He threw a scare into the neighbor and insured himself against any further interruption of his Sunday labor. Although he was as witty as Mark Twain (whom he closely resembled both as to his fine strong features and great mop of bushy hair) yet he always used his wit maliciously to crush any man or theory that interfered with his thrift. Thrift was the core of his religion, because money gave him might and might is the essence of the Almighty.

XXIII

DEATH as a reality came to my perception as to that of most youngsters by the passing of a grandparent. It was in midsummer when the hay was drying in the windrows and the sickle clicking its song of harvest as it nips stem from root and topples the unsuspecting herbage of the meadow. Grandfather Bradley had been "off his feed" as farm folk say, for several days and had not used his pipe or plug because "tobacco didn't taste right." He was eighty-four years old, and every morning of all those years he had straightened himself like a soldier for inspection, for he was determined that he would never bend his back to old age. On this morning as usual he straightened his shoulders with the erectness of a young athlete and walked out of doors. "I am going to take a chew of tobacco if it kills me," he said. A moment later my Aunt Annabelle felt a vibration, and running out of doors saw grandfather lying dead on the turf.

Aunt Annabelle was the second oldest of Oliver Stuart's children, and claimed to be a woman of liberated mind or, as she called it, "in advance of her times." The self-kidder believes he is the perfect man born ahead of his age and that in time all men will reach his degree of perfection. She was an unbeliever in all the commonly accepted thought and custom of the times. Yet she never forgot the last remark of her father—"A chew of tobacco

if it kills me." Since she never forgot it, she must have feared that it had something to do with his dropping dead the next minute. It did, but surely not in the voodoo way that she interpreted it. She must have believed, as all men do, that there is an evil spirit, an antagonist that man must not offend, lest it use its fiendish omnipotence to mock him. Yet she claimed to be an infidel, a free thinker and a revolutionary "a hundred years ahead of my time." A chew of tobacco killed her old father because he taunted an evil spirit once too often. Some such fear as this obsessed her. I think the tobacco killed him, but it would have killed him just the same had he said "God save the mark" when he took it. Already the pressure of his blood was all that his arteries would stand. The slight infusion of nicotine raised the pressure a hair's breadth and his heart broke.

He came of a race that knew how to live at truce with all dream devils, something that the Pilgrims never could learn. Through his blood my father had inherited much real wit and practical sense. Father used to say: "Never go hunting elephants in an airship; if you got one, you couldn't carry it home." Such wisdom never came from Pilgrim blood. So I say that this was the Scotch from grandfather's veins. He had been a farmer and horse trader and had accumulated $25,000 through thrift and industry, and he was well content. Governorships and mimic honors, coveted by his Alden wife, he had never striven for.

My father was afraid of life. Witty though he was, gifted more than his neighbors in every endowment of the mind, shrewd and practical enough to enrich himself

with every stroke of his hand, a combination of Scotch sense and Pilgrim literary symbolism, he thrived, won friends by wit and grew in power while the peasant Scotch in him prevailed, but when the Pilgrim fear at last ate to his vitals he shuddered and drew back.

Grandfather's legs had been his pillars while yet those legs bestrode the fields.

In haying time this old reaper of harvests went down like the grass; straight as a timothy stalk he crashed his full length to the turf and was no more. The blow left a purple bruise upon his waxen cheek, and this caused fresh agonies to Aunt Annabelle, the woman above the world. "If only that bruise weren't there," she sobbed as the family stood about the body. "It breaks my heart to see his dear old face bruised as with a blow." And she pleaded with the embalmer to remove that stain, but he said it was impossible. After all what difference did it make?

I was a boy, shocked with the first realization of mortality. Tears gushed from me, and I cried in lament over the going of this kind old man who had loved me. But I felt that the bruise on his face could make no difference. It was not inflicted by a human blow; no hand of his child had been lifted against him. Why then should his daughter feel that she had struck him?

The time came when I was to strike back against my father, but every blow bruised my own flesh with a purple stain.

XXIV

THE doctor who had been called at Grandfather's death told me to go and tell Grandmother and he would remain to see how she stood the shock. I found her not far from the house in one of her futile little garden spots—places which I have said before she picked out for their aridity and barrenness—and when I told her, she walked majestically to the house. I stumbled at her side, distress and consternation written on my face. She saw it and laughed at me. This was a great hour for her, a spotlight entrance, for she knew the doctor was waiting to see her. Sarah Bernhardt could not have made more of the moment. Her face radiated light and she seemed almost girlish. She walked to the couch where the dead man lay and lifting his leaden hand she held it tenderly in the two of hers and said:

"Good-by, Oliver. We are parted again. For sixty years we have walked side by side down thorny ways and through the flowering meads, through good and evil, joy and sorrow. The snows of eighty winters whiten our brows; it is the end of life, our work is done. I had hoped to go with you into that other world where side by side our happy souls could continue on forever. But you have gone without me, leaving your Priscilla to tarry here till her appointed time, which now indeed cannot be long. Wait for me, Oliver, I am coming. Do you hear me, Oliver? Good-by."

She kissed his hand and laid it abruptly down. Then she turned and shot quick glances at the doctor and at every face in the room. Then covering her face with her kerchief she strode swiftly to her own chamber. Later in the evening I heard her asking Aunt Annabelle: "How did it sound?" Such mockery had shocked my boy heart cruelly. The next day my Aunt Harriet, the oldest daughter, arrived, and her first words to Grandmother were: "Well, now, Mother, you have all the money you want." They were a sordid lot, even amid their lofty nightmares of idealism.

This Aunt Harriet had once accused Aunt Annabelle's husband of stealing six thousand dollars from Grandfather, and she was about to take legal steps against him when Grandmother confessed that she had stolen the money herself—and she pulled the bills out of her mattress and restored them to Grandfather's strong box. She had developed into the true miser; she loved money for money's sake; she never spent it on herself. She dressed in rags and let her silk dresses rot in her wardrobe. She would eat nothing at the table until everybody else had refused it and it was in danger of going to the chickens. She used to send money in small amounts to several of her indigent Alden relatives; but her real motive in stealing the money was just to have it. She had always been an actress, moving in a world of her own imagining; she was a miser spending ghost money for the silks, satins, horses, houses and grand châteaux of illusion.

After Grandfather's funeral the neighbors discussed how odd the whole affair was. "Those Bradleys must be Jews or something," they said. "They are so self-

centered, secretive and queer. It looked like they didn't want any of the neighbors to come to the old gentleman's funeral. Death is the time when human sympathy shows itself. They must be Jews or some secret cult, from the way they acted." When this came to my ears, I realized for the first time that we were a queer family, we lacked the knack of trailing with the tribe, we were born to be renegade. We tried to run with the pack, but the pack detected that we were off color and out of step. We Aldens have lived in America three hundred years and have not yet become Americanized. After living in England a thousand years without being able to join the English tribe, our family packed their steamer trunks and told the English to go to hell, and that's why we're here to-day.

Oliver Stuart Bradley, whose old bones we laid beneath the Kansas prairie grass, had pioneered half way across the continent and had been a part of every rude society in which he lived. In New York state he was a champion wrestler, in Wisconsin men said of him, "He's the best judge of horse flesh in the state." His every activity brought him in contact with other men whether to fling them to earth in wrestling or down them in a horse trade. But his Alden wife never entered his world of realism; she scoffed at such a world, believing it impalpable, imaginary, worthless. She and her children lived their lives outside it. She was a dream queen in the empire of self-kidding. Her Alden blood in that Stuart castle was a cuckoo's egg in a sparrow's nest. . . . Her crazy brood could never fuse in the realist's flock.

BOOK TWO

I

I WAS nineteen years old when I entered Kansas University at Lawrence. It was the typical little college town and was a direct descendant of Plymouth, Massachusetts, even as I myself was a direct derivation. But my blood fortunately was tempered by the German corpuscles from my mother, while the blood that tempered Lawrence town was negro blood from the relics of the John Brown Underground Railroad.

Lawrence had been one of the stations on that historic line of escape, a concentration depot for slaves who never thought of leaving the Missourians until enticed by Kansans. These petted negroes were insolent in the days when I walked in Lawrence and would shove the whites off the sidewalk into the gutter. I was shoved into the gutter time and again and became bitter in my hatred of blacks. The Aldens hated the South because it held the blacks down; now I hated the blacks because they held me down. Throngs of negro bucks and wenches filled the sidewalks and shrieked and laughed in their barbaric spirits, using the obscenest language in the hearing of white girls. My theory of life is that it is the destiny of man to make an ass of himself—in his effort to improve himself he ruins himself—to put it in the vernacular, every bean-eating Bostonian was born to spill the beans. Lawrence was my first insight into this law.

One Saturday afternoon I wandered up the riverside

to enjoy the solitude and muse upon the sunlit beauty of the woods and waters. Suddenly I came upon a group of naked negro men and women lolling on a patch of blue grass in an open space among the bushes. I retreated, but they had seen me, and one big black buck scrambled to his feet, seized a pistol lying on an outspread blanket and fired five bullets at me as I ran.

Later, on an election day, my brother Tom, dreamer and slave-freer that he was, saw a string of negroes filing into the alley entrance of a building where the Puritans of the day gave each black brother a bottle of whisky and three dollars as his share of liberty and equality before going to the polls.

Tom, the frenzied idealist, followed the negroes to the polling place and when they came out reproached them for selling their votes and being drunk.

The poor beasts became enraged at his hectoring. The light of slaughter lit in their drunken eyes. One African threw back his head, bared his teeth and red gums and shook his wolly noggin with a terrifying guttural challenge.

I happened along at that moment, and clapping my hand over Tom's mouth I dragged him away. The negroes growled behind us: "We'll keel you, white man."

Again that night I had my awful dream that Tom had fallen down and bumped his head on the pave and it had broken like a cocoanut shell, pieces rolling in all directions. . . .

II

MY two older brothers were in the University when I entered, and my brother Tom came along and entered a preparatory school. Father's allowance to the four of us totaled fifty dollars a month. We rented an old house at the edge of town and lived on bread, lard and potatoes. We called it "starving our way through college." Brother Tom had never been well, but I had known good health. Starving on this starch diet undermined my constitution. Brother Tom went deeper into the enchantment that dazzled his reason with its bright penumbra. Our father at that time owned seven farms of 160 acres each and had $32,000 lent out at interest. Our oldest brother, Johnnie, used to say: "Don't you know, fellows, the Governor is tight? He's a rich man and ought to give us enough money to live on." But Tom and I would turn on him and refuse to hear a word of detraction against our father who was still our shining hero. We used to tell our schoolmates that our dad was a smarter man than Roosevelt, a better poet than Kipling and a talker every bit as witty as Mark Twain. Never was a father more adored by his sons than he was.

During my freshman year I started a little magazine. We obtained an outfit of type for five dollars. The university governors had put in a printing outfit to print their own bulletins, the work to be done by students.

The plan was a failure because there was no one on the faculty that knew how to print. They thought any farmer could walk into a print shop and begin printing books and papers. So they set type before the students and told them to go to work. The students gummed up the type until they could print nothing legible, and then the printing venture ended.

My brothers and I hauled the type and fixtures to our little cottage and after washing the gummy ink off with gasoline we had a good printing outfit. The cover picture for the little magazine I made by carving woodcuts with a penknife. I soon became skillful at it. Our first issue was two hundred copies, sixteen pages of reading matter and four cover pages. The cover picture was in four colors laid on by hand. I found that I could illumine the whole edition in two nights of work. I wrote most of the material and the rest was written by brother Tom, with an occasional contribution from others. Our magazine went well. The sale of the first edition was 200 copies. We printed a few more the next time but the sale was about the same and stayed between two and three hundred copies during the two years that I continued to publish it. It sold for ten cents, and after the news-stand had taken its commission we received $16 for our first edition. The paper and ink had cost about four dollars, the labor we supplied, and as there were no other expenses, we had cleared $12, a welcome addition to our funds. Every month I used to draw a poster to display in the main hall announcing the new issue of the magazine. Afterward I always found a buyer for this poster at a dollar, and I always took the dollar straight to the

butcher shop to get our monthly taste of meat. My oldest brother always cussed me out for buying this meat. He said I should give him the dollar and let him buy the meat. He handled the money but never bought any meat. He spent the meat money to go to dances, and left the rest of us starve so he, poor egotist, could step high and wide and handsome.

But yearning for fresh-caught fish in a desert was good for me. It caused me to write a poem and I loved it all the more because this worldly brother mocked it.

A WISH IN THE DESERT

Flounder, flounder in the sea,
I would have a word with thee;
My wife Isabel,
Wishes what I dare not tell.

—Old Fairy Tale.

"I hanker for fish in a land where no river is near;
I have eaten salt bacon and bread for what seems like a year;

"Twould worry my husband to tell him. But how can I dare
let it pass?
But as well ask for water in Hades as—fish in this desert of
grass.
The turf sets the heat waves a-quiver, they flow and come
eddying back;
It's a hundred hot miles to the river that creeps in its drought-
narrowed track.

"Grass on the dome-like hill, grass in the sunken swale;
And never a babbling water course in the dip of the ancient dale;
The feet of the floods have passed, their murmur is heard no more,
And never a beaten track was cut in the grass of the valley floor.
But here and there in the hollow are shining water holes,
Grass-rimmed pools that are deep as wells, rounded like sugar bowls."

Jed returned from the field and found his wife in tears;
She told of her hopeless wish, she told of her bitter fears.
She had looked in the water hole, blue as the cloudless skies,
And had prayed that out of their limpid depth a flashing fin should rise.

The hoops from her wedding gown
She tore with a trembling hand,
And bade him fashion a sharpened hook
Out of the iron band.
She shredded the silken garment fine
And tied the strips for a fishing line.
And now with a red-wing hopper bait,
They fling the line in the pool—and wait.

"God of the prairies and the sea,
Of the vale of Hebron and Galilee,
Christ of the loaves and magic fishes,
You looked on the nets that Peter drew,
And told the fishers to cast anew;
Hark to our prayer, and be propitious!"

A ripple widens and blurs and thins,
A flip—and the flying body passes,
Fluttering gills and fanning fins—
And the catfish flops in the tangled grasses.
A cry of joy and a thankful prayer,
And a skillet sings in the dugout there.

III

THE people of Lawrence were transplanted Puritans from Massachusetts but they believed that history began with the founding of that town and everything of true import dated back to the departure of John Brown from that soil and the arrival of the Missouri guerillas under one Quantrell who burned the town. They had erected this burning of Lawrence into some such sacred legend as the fall of Troy combined with the crucifixion of Jesus. They were self-kidders, as regards their importance, and their tribal legend was the sacred book of the One Great Race. Although Harvard was the mother of Kansas University, the Kansans had become race-conscious and they hooted Harvard; they despised that superior school because of envy just as their ancestors in New England had despised the society of Old England because it was superior to theirs. There was one Harvard instructor in Kansas University, a teacher of French named Lincoln. Despite his bearing a name sacred in the voodoo of Kansas, and surpassed in magic only by John Brown, the Kansans persecuted him. They ridiculed his Harvard accent, mocked his manner and insulted him. They did it because they knew he was a gentleman, and the presence of gentility like that of intelligence is an unintentional insult to rough-necks. Mr. Lincoln and I became intimate friends although I was pretty much like the other boors. He told me that his father

had been an ironmaster and had been ruined by a labor war. Young Lincoln was in Paris when the family fortunes collapsed. He came home steerage and caught an eye infection that destroyed one of his eyes. He got employment as a teacher of French because it was the only thing he could do, and accepted the place at Kansas. "The moment I am offered a place in the East," he confided to me, "I shall shake the dust of this pigsty from my patent leathers with no vain regrets, I assure you." He was the first cultivated man I ever met, and I was then twenty years old.

The head of the French department was a Gallic lady of great wit and charm. I first met her when I was called on the carpet by the board of student publications for referring to President Roosevelt as "Rosy" in an essay in my magazine. She was chairman of the board and she saw me in private in her office. From a paper she read a long list of objections to the policy of my periodical. All of them were of a validity equal to "the indecency of referring to our President by such an irreverent and vulgar nickname as 'Rosy.'" She told me that the faculty had decided that she, as chairman of the publication board should censor everything I wrote. I replied that I was unable to see any weight to any of the objections she had filed. "If these objections are sensible," I said, "then my inability to see the sense of them shows that I am a fool. In that case I should be not censored but suppressed. I am conscientious, and I must continue to follow my own light until I can see a better one. I shall certainly submit to no censorship by you nor anybody else. If I commit any wrong, punish me for it. But do not prove me

an ass before I have brayed. Why put me under a peace bond by taking my brains as hostage to insure my good conduct, as a mother locks up a bad boy's pants to keep him from running away from home?" She smiled merrily and I continued my magazine uncensored.

One day there was a disgraceful class fight in chapel between the sophomores and freshmen. Several professors were so indiscreet as to try to interfere in this class fight and they had their eyes blackened. I was called before the disciplinary committee, hastily tried and convicted of rioting and assaulting certain members of this professors' committee. Over my protest of innocence they were passing sentence of expulsion on me although I had not been aware of the fight until two days after it happened. I was at home at the time, entirely covered with an eruption of poison ivy, with both eyes swelled shut so tight I couldn't see. They were expelling me for no other reason than that I owned a free journal that they feared, although God knows I never attacked anybody in my magazine. It contained nothing but poems, editorial essays and fairy tales, the latter written by my wonderful brother Tom who was in the high school and was writing tales of a weird country and a weird people much in the manner later developed by Lord Dunsany. When I told these professors that I had been ill and at the point of death while the fight was going on, they told me I was a liar.

"Where did you find any poison ivy?" one professor asked.

"I was taking a romantic stroll through the woods,"

I answered, and then characteristically added, "with another man's wife."

They thought I was more brazen in my lies than ever. But it was the truth; I had been lured out by a college widow; the poisoning that bowled me over was almost symbolic. Truthful donkey that I was, I gave the facts. Why not? This was a co-educational institution. And the lady was educating me. But my frankness was beyond the Faculty of Kansas. They knew I lied and it was vain, said they, for me to try to deceive them.

Of course I could not respect them for their contempt of the facts. These prejudiced "educators" did not care to hear the truth. One of them, however, took my part. He was Olin Templin, head of the department of philosophy. He was a real philosopher. He rebuked the others for calling me a liar without being able to prove it and thus hung up the matter because no one had the courage to move for a decision.

In college I was also befriended by Professor William Herbert Carruth, who found in me a kindred spirit. Carruth was the author of a popular poem called *Evolution*, sketching the epochs from the nebular slime till Socrates and Jesus were immolated. "Some call it evolution, and others call it God." Frustration was the bitter essence of his blood. "To have fought for the Right and been crushed is glory enough for one day," was his precept. Glory? Why do we want Glory? Why do we have to have "glory enough"? We who lacked the strength to win our victory, we who were baffled, easily downed in our futility, must nevertheless have our Victory, our imaginary glory . . .

I had but one strength—words. In writing I was glib, in oratory I was overwhelming. I resolved to tackle the big world with this cunning and bring it to heel; it was my only talent and I began banking big on it. I would be a mouth master like Bryan or a thunderer from the press. But whether through the channel of oratory or by editorial pulpiteering I should address the congregation of the world, my message should be the same. I would give the world instruction, reconstruction. I would point out by metaphor and fable the great truths obscured by the dust of a world in action, truths invisible to marching men, but to my eyes clearly seen, and through my eloquence to be shouted from the housetops of creation.

Entering the oratorical contest, which that year offered four prizes ranging from $100 to $10, I felt confident of some sort of victory. My natural talents were so great that surely one small college could not afford four orators surpassing me. Even if the unheard-of number of three geniuses were there to soar above me, that left me fourth place at least, and that meant ten dollars. And how desperately I needed that ten dollars!

The day of the contest came, and there were eleven orators. I had been assigned last place. They had put one over on me. I was amazed and dismayed. Long before my turn was near, the audience was wearied and sickened of such an ordeal of oratory. They waited and they went to sleep. At last I came. The audience looked up, but forgot to return to their nap. I held them spellbound.

It was over, and the judges prepared their decisions.

The judges, I remember with dismay, were three preachers. One orator had spoken on the theme, "Jesus, the Greatest Figure in History." They had to give him first place on that. I got mad at Jesus then and hated Him for years. Another orator spoke on Wendell Phillips. I didn't know who Wendell Phillips was, but learned by listening to the oration, that he somehow abolished human slavery. Those Kansas preachers had to give Wendell Phillips second prize. They couldn't give him first place and crowd Jesus out. I said in my heart: "To Hell with Wendell Phillips!" The next orator spoke on "Spiked Guns; or the Dawn of Universal Peace." The preachers had to give Peace their approval, and that took care of the first three prizes. They were now free to consider the oratorical contest, and brought in a verdict for me—for fourth place.

I saw right then that in a world where there was Peace, Jesus and the Liberators of Mankind, there was no justice for me. I could never get a look in. I was off of civilization for life; it had done me dirt—and could be damned.

But if I had failed of getting justice, I had at least won ten dollars. That was consolation; that was glory enough for one day.

But when the prizes were awarded, they told me that they had been unable to "raise the full amount" and could only give me half my quota. Thereupon I was handed a slip of paper good for one-half dozen cabinet size photographs at a local photographer's. Not for cash prizes had we been competing, as we had supposed. They didn't tell us that the prize fund consisted of "orders"

on the merchants, barbers, liverymen and other victims of the organized begging of the Uplifters. It soothed my frothing madness to reflect that if I had won nothing of value, neither had the Victory of Jesus gained him anything but free shaves, and shines, street-car tickets, laundry credits, and the franked services of the local Pants Cleanatorium and shoe-shine parlors.

Ass that I was, I was yet too foxy to go to the photographer and receive, as the prize of my heroic effort, six pictures of myself. That would have been too much even for an ass.

IV

AT college I fell heir to the record made by that Direct Descendant, my smart cousin Geeshan. I had been told that his was the most brilliant career ever known in that college. Aunt Harriet assured me everybody would tell me so. But nobody ever did. This did not shock me, for the Aldens' accounts of their importance in America were out of all proportion to what the rest of America says.

Being contentious by nature Joe had shone as a star in the college debating squads. He was against everything—against the trusts, against the banking laws, against the gold standard. He was against the East because he was born in the West; he was against the West because he was going East to complete his education. In his debates he did not stick to facts and arguments as the rules required, but ridiculed, bulldozed and insulted his opponents. On the question: "Resolved, That corporations should be prohibited," Joe saw his chance. Noted as a trust buster, he was assigned to defend the corporation. Kansas, being a land of farmers, believes that corporations are indefensible. Joe confounded his opponents by piling up overwhelming arguments in favor of them. Then he ridiculed the men who propounded the question, pointing out that the very town of Lawrence was an incorporation. He was so witty that they couldn't beat him. He was like my father.

In time Joe aroused such hatred among the leaders of the debating society that they decided to rush upon him and manhandle him. He was president of the society, and his position at a desk on a platform made a frontal attack feasible. The men advised the girls to absent themselves from this particular meeting, as the oratory was to be supplemented by the bums' rush. The secret entrusted to the women came promptly to Joe's ear.

Joe's mind had now assimilated a world of learning, and if learning builds character he would be a brave soul; but his power to digest a good hard wallop on the nose was as weak as in the days when I had seen him run blubbering in surrender from a fist fight. But in those days he had learned a way out. I remember that on his last visit among the schoolboys of Harrow he displayed a trick knife with a blade that telescoped into the handle and leaped out at the pressure of a button. We spread the legend that he had knifed several ruffians with this stiletto. The town boys repeated this among themselves and the blade kept growing in their imagination, until finally they were terrorized and dared not challenge him to single combat.

On the night chosen by the Kansas students for manhandling him *en masse*, president Joe called the debating society to order. At a word from the leader a phalanx of double-fisted clodhoppers made for him. Joe swung two loaded pistols of .45 caliber from behind the desk and the visitors were held for downs on his one-yard line.

Joe took his bachelor's degree and his master's degree at Kansas University and as side studies learned everything from stenography to charcoal drawing. I do not

exaggerate. Uncle Bass had willingly borne the cost of all this, for he saw that Joe was striding forward toward the goal. Every man jack of us in America must be Cæsar or nothing—we have no common people. The cunning that had told Uncle Bass to make a long walk to get a horse that he might ride the rest of the way through the war, advised Joe's long stalking of the steed of knowledge, on which high horse he could at last ride down the world.

V

ALTHOUGH Joe Geeshan finished at the University of Kansas before I entered there in 1900, he had not gone on to Harvard at once. The Captain was short of cash, and Joe had to take a school to teach out in the Short Grass country while his "Mammy" stayed in the college town with the two younger children.

It was the first time that Joe had ever slept under a roof that his mother wasn't under and he didn't like it. It is hard to wean the Aldens, they stick to their ancestors. Joe grew homesick and wanted to give up his school. He wrote endless letters to mammy complaining that his scholars were Germans and therefore unteachable. Knowledge is power, but *Mit der Dumheit* power itself is powerless. Fate had handed him this gold brick to balk his teaching career. "Blessings on the man," he wrote, "who first said, Damn the Dutch!" With Alden wit he ridiculed the plump rosy German girls, who, mistaking his leanness for hunger, brought gifts to his boarding house of smoked goose, sauerkraut and *Schwartenmagen* "for the professor." He took the skin off of every one who came in touch with him and he tanned it with the acid of his wit. His peppery letters about nothing were carefully filed by his Mayflower mother for inclusion in the "Life and Letters of Joseph Alden Geeshan." While I believed that Joe was undoubtedly going to be a world

beater, I thought that planning the memoirs of a long successful life was a bit "preamateur" as his illiterate dad used to say. The boy was already escaping from life into literature.

Joe next went to Ann Arbor for two years of political economy and won his doctor's degree with a book that showed the relationship between the drought years with their cycle of credit inflation followed by the cycle of financial panics. Now at last he was ready for the Harvard Law School, and his mother went with him to inspect Cambridge and Boston. They also visited Plymouth and stood in awe before the "old family house." Uncle Bass did not go East on this pilgrimage. Alden blood meant nothing to him. He believed in force and cunning. And he had them. And they had brought him riches and power, something that the Aldens couldn't get and which they have therefore always vilified and yearned for. Yes, he had gained riches and power. But how much richer and more powerful he might have been if he had had an education! "All he knowed he learnt hisself" as he expressed it. He had gone into the army illiterate and had come out a captain. He might have come out in Grant's shoes if he had been instructed, for he had all the qualities of Grant except his education. By learning what he could, he had made himself rich in a poor country at the expense of the untutored mishaps living there. "Know more than the other fella, and you can always do him," declared Uncle Bass. He shocked me when he advised me thus, for I was not greedy at heart and wished to rob no man. "Lawyers," he continued, "all get rich because they know more than their clients. I seen a big

railroad lawyer in Topeker beat a forty-thousand-dollar damage suit slick as a whistle just by laughing a doctor outen the witness stand. That lawyer done shown the jury that he knowed more about medicine than the doctor did. A good lawyer ort to know everything. If he knows everything he can beat anybody. That's why I am having Joe learn everything. And when he comes out of law school he will be the smartest man in this country."

VI

THE fetish of the Kansas religion is the whipped slave. Weeping in tribal concert is one of their peculiar orgies. Kansas was the center of the Union and the Kansans were the central tribe and the smartest branch of the Yankee nation. This was the tribal propaganda which I ever heard there. At Kansas University I expected to meet the cream of this superior tribe and was prepared to come in contact with a great number of brilliant young men and women. All were evangelists. I rated myself as just an average young boob, and although I had been among the ablest pupils in our township, I expected to be rather overwhelmed with better selections when the combing of the entire state should meet me in competition. But their average of mediocrity caused me to be regarded as one of the bright students.

As a mob the gospel of *pep* appealed to them convincingly. My own reaction to pep was ironic. In my little college magazine I wrote the paragraph: "We *can* because we are *Kan*sans." Later I felt ashamed of writing it. But it fired the herd to an hooray of enthusiasm. Sickly self-worship.

There were hundreds of pep secretaries in embryo waiting only an opportunity to address an audience or be exalted to the appalling heights of *yell leadership*. One chap preached a lay sermon in chapel taking as his text: "And he made the stars also." His theme was that one

might draw great comfort from the fact that the same Creator who made the intellectual giants also made him. If he couldn't be a blazing sun he was at least a luminous star.

But plainly the fellow wasn't a star, since he shed no light. He wasn't even a tallow candle. He was merely an unlighted suet head. All such self-appointed leaders proclaimed that they "had a message." And their messages when delivered consisted of "show some pep" . . . "Let's go" . . . "Watch Wichita's Wallop" . . . "So near is God to man—when Duty whispers low 'You must,' the youth replies, 'I can.'" The gospel of "I can" is rapidly becoming the American national religion. It is the reflex of his fear that probably he can't.

Twice I had my pockets picked when my clothes were in the locker and I was in the gymnasium. I noticed that one of the starry-eyed pep secretaries was always hanging around the dressing room. The first time I lost four dollars, the second time one dollar. I had earned the dollar selling a poster I had drawn, copying the idea from Mucha who was then the rage in Paris. (I yearned for Paris and cherished the ambition to be an artist.)

I was ever a bad loser; and having my pockets picked by fellow students angered me so that I cursed. Later the pickpocket was caught in the act, and he was this warm-eyed bible-banger. Of course my Christian classmate was dismissed from college. I said to him at parting: "Man, you don't need a college education to enable you to make a living. You already know a lucrative trade."

The pep secretary believes that because his morals are better than yours he is entitled to your money. He is so

near to Godhead that when Duty whispers that he must have your offering, he replies that he can get it.

Kansas is a little nation of pep secretaries and can supply enough of these peculiar beings to man the charity pumps of the world. There are more students from Kansas in China than from any of the larger nations on earth. That type, the zippy bearer of glad tidings proliferates in Kansas, and seeks the Chinaman because he is meek. From Puritan Massachusetts came the seed of this plague of pamphleteers to enforce their reforms upon the lowly races. A pamphleteer is a man with a message. He is spiritual pep without social intelligence.

One of the message-bringers, who annually came to Lawrence and put on a big community weep, was called "Engineer McGuire." He spoke to "men only," a trick that appeals to the pious because they believe they will hear something richly repulsive. Engineer McGuire lectured to a churchful of males and told them how he had been an unregenerate young man. His drinking, cursing and continual carousing broke his mother's heart, he told us, and she died, but he continued to raise hell until his "father's gray hairs were brought in sorrow to the grave." He even went so far as to strike his mother with his fist. While he was thus describing his inhuman treatment of his "loved ones," the audience began to cry. Instead of getting up and kicking this preposterous bounder out, they melted into a tribal orgy of unmanly weeping. As I looked at that gathering of snuffling red-blooded he-men soggy in a "crying drunk" of emotionalism, I said to myself, "I am not of this clan. But because I came as an invited guest I will refrain from breaking up the show."

So I started home for supper, leaving the weepers to cry themselves to death if they wanted to. As I looked back at the church I almost expected to see the brine pouring over the sacred sills and running in rivulets down the gutter. They had advertised themselves as "men only," but there was not a man in that whole credulous aggregation of he-mourners. If I had ever been tough enough to slap my mother and break my father's heart, I think I should be tough enough to laugh at the recollection of it. Of course this Engineer McGuire had never done the beastly things he lied about but he had learned that there is a sucker public in Kansas that loves to weep over the misdeeds of others, and he earned his dollars as a professional wet-nurse taking these weepers to his bosom. These men were the descendants of the pamphleteers who came to Kansas to weep over the poor Louisiana niggers lashed by Simon Legree.

VII

MOTHER, bringing the younger members of the family, had moved to Lawrence to "see the children through school." Father had suggested the plan. He had seven farms scattered through Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska and divided his time among them. Mother was a willing, dutiful and energetic woman. Her husband had but to indicate his will and she went ahead and did it; whether it be to purchase a new team of horses, butcher a steer or sell off a carload of cattle.

To mother's surprise, father, after completing his business in Nebraska and Iowa that Fall, did not follow the family to the new home, but returned to the farmhouse at Harrow and lived with the tenant family to whom he had rented the farm. He claimed that his family had abandoned him, that they had gone crazy about education and women's clubs and regarded him as an ignorant has-been of whom they were ashamed.

His courage had faltered after he had given mother the order to move to Lawrence. His own ordeal would come in facing the educated society of a college town.

In the two years that the family lived at Lawrence he visited us once or twice when passing through with cattle for the Kansas City market but would not live with us, always returning to the desolate old farmhouse in Western Kansas to brood over his imaginary wrongs.

He sent her fifty dollars a month to provide for a family of six. The house rent was eighteen dollars a month, leaving thirty-two dollars, about a dollar a day to supply food, fuel, clothing and books for a large family. Had the entire dollar a day been spent for food, it would have allowed only seventeen cents a day for each mouth. But when light, coal, books, clothing and all incidentals had to come out of that dollar also, it is plain to see why we nearly starved. Besides doing all the housework and the sewing for her family mother took in sewing from others to eke out her pitiful allowance. The money I earned from my little magazine was enough to pay for my books and laboratory fees and provide my clothing. Besides editing the magazine, I was carrying extra studies so as to complete the four-year course in three years. This exhausting work with insufficient food sapped my vitality and made me tubercular. At that time father had forty thousand dollars of his own capital and the twenty-five thousand left by my grandfather, for he did not divide this property with his four sisters until long afterward—at the conclusion of a nasty quarrel in court. My father was still my hero and I never asked him for a dollar; my mother was too loyal to question his parsimony.

My mother had borne eight sons to this Wilber hero who now was afraid to live with her in Lawrence. One had died before I was old enough to remember and another when I was a child in Harrow. Thus mother had given birth to seven sons before a girl was born. For years both father and mother had wanted a daughter and as son after son was born this wish for a girl grew almost overwhelming. And when at last my only sister was born,

father was moved to a delicious ecstasy and taking up pencil he wrote:

I recall when angels brought her,
Such a tiny, dainty daughter,
Precious pearl;
How I laughed and said to mother:
"Luck has changed, somehow or other—
It's a girl!"

How mixed joy and surprise
Stood revealed in mother's eyes—
Love's disclose;
And her trembling hand sought mine,
Convoy of that love divine,
That Heaven knows.

And her placid spirit then
Could have smiled at death again,
As it had;
But now peace was come instead,
And in triumph mother said:
"I'm so glad!"

Here was true felicity, conjugal rapture, the voice of a tender spirit speaking tenderly. And many a poem like that he wrote in the days of his young noon before the clouds of melancholy descended on his spirit. Somehow, the three men in American history that have seemed the realest to me, are Poe, Lincoln and Mark Twain. Is it because I saw these three natures living in my father? These men have always seemed real to me; all other

men are shadowy figures. Or is it because these men were visionaries and visions are more real to us than facts?

And now our father was living alone in the old farmhouse at Harrow, indicting all his children and inflicting on them the same punishment that gnawed at his own sad soul. He complained that his wife and children, being better educated, were ashamed of him and didn't want him around. I knew that my mother's heart was breaking because of his mistreatment of her. It was the first time that I had realized that the man was playing the part of the baby. He had always been my hero, I thought him handsomer and wiser than a god. Never had I questioned the utter wisdom of his every act and word. I remembered him in his hour of triumph when he had humbled every debater in the village conclaves and walked like a Cæsar with a senate at his heels, and I remembered him in grief when a baby died, I then a child of seven, too young to know the pangs of grief, and yet I wept to see him grieve. He placed the miniature coffin in the hallway, then bearing the little body from the stricken mother's bed, he placed it in the coffin and knelt above it blinded with his tears. I crept to his side and said: "Papa, why are you crying?" He put his arm about me and said tenderly: "This is death. This little baby is your brother, my new born son, and he is dead. We must take him out and put him under ground. We will not see this baby any more." And then I joined my sobs with his until the spasm of our emotion spent itself.

The baby was buried in the front yard on the farm beside a previous one that I could not remember. I was too young to realize that if he had bought a lot in the

village cemetery he would have conformed to a tribal custom that would have knitted him in the tribe. But little by little he ostracized himself from tribal contact, and he helped to alienate himself by this penurious act of burying his dead in his dooryard.

When school was out that summer I went to live with him in the rotting old farmhouse where he moped alone. I started mowing the grass for the calves and said: "I better not mow here, had I? For right here somewhere—are the babies' graves."

"Mow anywhere," he said. "I don't know where those graves are and I don't care. It makes no difference now. I have no family any more. I am cast out and forgotten."

VIII

"UNCLE BASS GEESHAN is dead."

Mother intoned the news from a letter held by fright-taut fingers.

I looked quizzically at her face become dour with solemn, ritual sympathy. Somehow it all struck me as funny . . . bumptious Bass bowled over . . . mother's trite grief . . . and I broke into trills of giddy laughter.

"Are you crazy to laugh, Roy? Don't——"

"No, dear mother," I answered somberly enough. "It's brain-laughter. It was not from my heart but from my head. Bragging, bullying Bass now become a stiff carcass and tumbled into a trench. He tricked and browbeat father. You and father always described Bass as a ruffian, liar, thief. By cheating father on the Wilber note and making him the villain and victim of the Wilber County Seat war, Uncle Bass made father the bitter, harsh man he now is and damned all the Bradleys. At least, that's what you have been saying right along. If it's true, why weep over the horse-thief's death? So I laugh."

At any rate, it's great to be an ass—when you can laugh at death.

And what of Big Bass's hope and heir—the double-barreled scholar and statesman, Joe Geeshan?

At thirty Joe had finished his course at the Harvard Law School. He had formed no intimate friendships there, but many respected his stinging wit for he had

scored on every one. He went to New York City and joined a big firm as law clerk. But only routine work fell to him and he was eager to get his teeth into a real suit so that he could rise to his proper stature in the great metropolis. Once or twice he got wind of prospective meat and tried to snitch a damage suit. But nothing came his way and he got sick of the East as his fathers had got sick of England.

Joe said that everything went by favor and family pull in the East and a Westerner had no chance. It did not occur to him that if he was the smartest man in America, he should have been smart enough to know that things go by friendship and family pull—and to have established these friendships and their connections with powerful families. The point I am making is that we Aldens break our noses against the simplest facts. We cannot learn from the outside world. We merely complain against it. All that we have is what we were born with, a racial process forever raging within us.

Uncle Bass died and Joe came into money. He never returned to New York. He never mentioned New York again. When others mentioned it he sneered. He joined a law firm in Kansas City. Uncle Bass had closed his own career as bravely as he had begun it. To the bedside had come the minister and some of the farm tenants. Although the Captain had lived an ungodly life and was cruel to all these people, they pitied him in his agonies. The minister said: "Accept his grace now, and you will meet all of us in Heaven."

"I'll meet you in hell!" gasped the Captain with his last breath.

Even in Kansas City, a rude cow town where Joe Geeshan was among his own people, he did not advance in his profession.

Loaded with that education, which was to make him the smartest man in the world, he was back among the sorghum lappers—in their citadel. Yet he could not club them into serfdom nor persuade them to his will, as Uncle Bass had done.

While attending card parties in the homes of old schoolmates he solicited a few small-fry divorce cases. Seventy thousand dollars had been spent on his education, and in three years of law practice he had earned back but $1,200. Joe rejected Kansas City as hopeless and returned to the "ranch" at Saddle Rock. The place had fallen into decay, and all the lands were mortgaged. His mother was a dying woman. All that the Geeshan bulldog blood had gathered, the Alden witty blood had dissipated. At his mother's request he dropped the Joe from his name and was now "Alden Geeshan, Lawyer." Thus he hung out his sign at Saddle Rock, and when his puzzled neighbors asked about the Alden part of it he told them that John Alden was one of America's greatest men and that the Alden name was one to conjure with. They had never heard of it, so it did not conjure them. The smart lawyers of Chickasaw, the county seat, continued to get all the business. Joe finally ran for county attorney on the plea that he was a farmer, and the farmers should elect one another to office. He was defeated by a young Swede. His mother realized that his education had not enabled him to dominate the world—that willful men had ignored him, and in the knowledge of his defeat she died.

IX

IN my day the great American ass fell in love by being flattered. The woman whom the solemnly good American loved, lived inviolately in his reverential regard. Sex was never associated with her: the foul, unmentionable thing belonged in the brothel. Thus you may understand how the average American youth of my college era could visit sordid dollar houses and yet at the same time be devoutly in love with the "ideal" woman. Our prudish tradition taught us that sex was a filthy practice to be scrupulously relegated to houses of prostitution.

So you see me in my second year in college with love coming upon me like some sacred revelation.

The vision was a college widow, Virginia Claymore by name, a perfect example of sexual hypocrisy.

I met Virginia through a chum, George Rock, a printer working his way through college. I hired George to help me set type on my magazine and soon we were bosom friends. In his company I often met the fascinating college widow and soon we were given to sweetly sly glances. Fancy my feelings when this lovely lady slipped a letter in my hand. It dazed me with its abruptness and the phrases read like specimens lifted out of current American novels and I responded with poetic gallantry.

She wrote:

"In the beginning George and I flirted under the influence of the boredom of summer school and the magic of the midsum-

mer moon. I thought at first I loved him. I hoped to get a divorce and marry him. Now I see how silly it all was. Nothing can ever come of it. I could never be a mate for George Rock.

"Convey it to him gently that I do not love him. Make him hate me if you can. It is all for his sake."

As unhumorously as my own Alden grandmother would have taken this, I read it. And the blue birds in my veins and the red birds in my arteries all began to sing. Is it not pathetic that thus came the spring with perfume and plum blossoms, mint and rosemary, and the June rise in life's mystic river?

I myself laughed; I laughed egotistically. Here was triumph. Cæsar thrice declined a crown. And I presented with the crown of love would doff it deprecatingly, like Cæsar. Like father I could only picture myself as an emperor.

Charmed and enamored of me, a greater printer than George Rock, the passionate Virginia was giving him over; she was untying her loyalty to the toy balloon because now her eyes had seen the moon itself.

The first part of the letter read:

"Mr. Roy Bradley:

"Dear Friend:

"I feel I can appeal to you in this matter because you are George Rock's most intimate friend. You know the story of his infatuation for me. It is hopeless. I can never marry him because I am already married. . . ."

In those days everything had par value. I even believed in the human race.

I was crossing the golf links toward the athletic field. The air was spicy with the scent of springing grass and bursting weed seeds and the spring sunshine poured down in almost tropical intensity.

A hundred paces ahead of me there dallied a girlish figure in a short-skirted gown of blue and white, now half hidden, now reappearing under the blue parasol billowing up and down like a toy balloon carried by a child. I recognized Virginia Claymore and threaded my way among the scattered moving groups and eventually overtook the thistledown lady drifting so aimlessly in the breeze.

No, she was not going to the baseball game. With a plaintive note she told how her husband Henry Claymore was so absorbed in his study of entomology that he spent his holidays in his laboratory mounting his specimens of coleoptera, hymenoptera and what not. She puckered her appetizing little mouth in pouring forth this wail of loneliness.

That was very long ago and all the world was young. How could I laugh at this, being descended from the Courtship of Miles Standish in the Alden line myself?

I walked close to her, keeping step to the swish of her silk skirts, and she looked up at me with sparkling eyes.

"I want to talk to you about our friend Rock," she said in sober tones. "The attachment he seems to feel for me is becoming embarrassing. You know I can't regard him as one-tenth the man you are."

"Well, thank heaven," I sighed, "I have nothing to do with your regards. I'm not responsible in any way; I'm innocent."

But the teasing, beautiful little baggage was wooing me, and the sense of it got me quickly, like too much liquor, before one knows it. The landscape seemed to rise and swing about like the surge of a merry-go-round, mingling the gayly dressed men and girls. I staggered for the moment. Young sexual passion, unsuspected, was the strong drug.

I was flattered to the depths of my desire. An ugly duckling in my own community, I was the swan in the eyes of this young woman who had seen the world. I was not a Charley Dents raising a regiment of fools to fight in a war that never was. Love is an old campaigner's game, and here I was . . . triumphant in the first battle.

"You dear dunce," she said, kicking her tiny, yellow-shod toe into the turf. "George Rock never mattered at all. It was you I was interested in all the time."

My mind ceased recording things sanely after that.

"I have loved you from the moment I first knew you," she continued. "I have tried in a hundred ways to let you know, but you are so stupid."

Whereat the ass fell into the maddest fit of infatuation.

I had never been courted before; and now the fiery little beauty Virginia was urging me to take her to my bosom. How sweet to the male it is to be wheedled and tempted, almost too sweet to endure.

It was a great moment for us both. Virginia had proved out a new experience in her amative progression. She was testing the delights of her new boldness, of using her sex-lure all uninvited; she was enjoying the effect on herself and on her prey. And so we strolled along, drugged with the subtle incense of our own wickedness.

I was on the defensive and too dumb to know it. I talked as a dazed fighter fights, groggy and clinging to the ropes while the lunging aggressor carries the action to him.

Virginia was small. She would sit on the seat above me at the baseball games and bend down to talk into my ear. Her feet were on the bench beside me. The curves of her ankles were exquisite.

She chattered about my great qualities of mind. I was easily the greatest man in the college. I was destined to be the smartest man in America. She had long dreamed of such a shining one. And now she had met me. My magazine was the most brilliant thing the world had known. And yet I printed some rhymes that George Rock wrote.

"Do not let your friendship for that clever printer blind you," she counseled coquettishly. "The fact is that he cannot write anything good enough for the Bradley magazine. He's a good fellow, but he is like a glow-worm and you are a blazing sun!"

Not bad stuff, that, for a boy born in Nebraska and reared in Prohibition Kansas. I am too honest, even now, to try to tell you that I didn't like it.

She claimed to be one of nature's aristocrats, too. And nothing, I argued to myself, tops off your patrician finish better than tapering calf and close-knit ankle like those beside me in Virginia's yellow boots.

This was the first deep, drugging draught of sex that I had drunk from the well of being. Thus two enchanted ones conversed and smiled and jested and felt the mystic currents tingle through their bodies. We scarcely saw the baseball players struggling upon the field. The coach-

ing and the cheering of the multitude was like an echo song heard in some waking dream.

As Dickens wrote: "I heard some drunkard falling down the stairs . . . and it was me."

But it is sweet to the soul of a farmer boy to know that a woman who has ventured farther and looked on life can find in him the qualities to inspire again the grand passion.

In those first encounters Virginia chatted always about my qualities. For a woman has to arouse a youth by talk of his own all-conquering virility before she can ask him to tarry while she talks of the greater qualities that are hers. She predicted my conquest of the world; she gloried in it. And all she wished for her share was to crown me with her adoration and cast her affection like flowers at my feet. She would place me under no obligation. She was too noble.

And I thought: "How pleasant it is to sit in the presence of this woman and bask in the warmth of her personality."

But this little bonfire of self-satisfaction being kindled in my soul by the amorous advances of Virginia was a temporary blaze, I thought, where I could warm my hands while waiting for the more distant and greater conflagration which was to be my literary success!

But this ardent bit of Eve's flesh was already the wife of another man.

There was no chance for me to wander nearer to the gaping pit of hell than just close enough to enjoy the pleasant glow of the warm coals.

X

As my college years went on Virginia insinuated herself deeper and deeper into my heart. We took long rambles over the prairie land beyond the University heights and down through thicket-clad ravines where chirping birds hid in the trellises or flew like scarlet meteors from one leafy sanctuary to another. The note of pleading in Virginia's voice took its color from the voices of the cooing birds; and the ardent pressure of her hand spelt comradeship and sincerity.

"I am so glad—so glad," cried Virginia, putting her arms about me and kissing me full on the mouth.

"Why are you glad?" I stammered.

"Because you are all mine!"

We were silent a moment and could almost hear the flutter of each other's hearts.

Now that I was all hers, she began telling me about a previous love and then another and another until they trod on one another's heels, so fast they came. I should have quit right there. But I took the little pangs of jealousy quite nobly, being of a race that takes the world's crucifixions seriously and with a proud nobility.

Virginia, it seems, was born on a ranch in Western Kansas far from railroads and civilization. But the ranch house had a grand piano and Virgie was a prodigy of music. . . . She also had a broncho for riding, a wild

animal that even the cowboys were afraid of, and she used to dash madly over the prairies thinking great vibrant, purple and important thoughts. But her pony stepped in a prairie-dog hole and fell. Virginia, strange gifted sprite of the desert plains, was injured and lay in a semi-trance for months and a year. Her father brought skilled physicians from Denver, Ogden, Kansas City and other points. They could do little for her. The accident caused the loss of her musical gift. But now, now that she had found this great love of mine, she believed that her musical gift would come back to her.

"And I have found you." As she said this she looked up with that peculiar smile which no lips but hers could form. Fondly and tenderly I pressed her to my bosom. I felt that the world had been cruel indeed in its buffeting of this young woman—the bloom of girlhood was still on her cheeks. Her body was tiny, delicate, well molded; her very beauty, it seemed, would have won the protecting favor of the gods.

"I have been a sorry traveler in life's desert," she sighed. "I have pursued mirages and now I am famishing for love."

"You have me now," I murmured, my temples flushed with her spell.

This Kansas lass was a Madame Bovary but I was no Flaubert to observe her.

"I have groped for love," she continued between caresses.

"I have been twisted and tortured in the hands of fate which plucked me out of the dark swamp and quagmire where my soul glowed as a sickly fox-fire in the fog.

Perhaps my fibers will thrill with a great melody. My music will return to me in the gift of your love."

"Virginia," I said softly, "you are worthy of some prince who could give you love and all the treasures of the world."

"Love is all I desire," she answered. "There was a time long ago when I dreamed of jewels and pretty things. God, how I have risen above it. To-day I would dwell in a hut of bark and wear hodden gray, and be happy in a peasant's wooden shoes, if the heart of a true man were mine; a man with a lion heart, whom I could encourage and enspirit and love into becoming all that destiny had decreed that he might be."

I pressed her tighter in my arms, and thought of myself as that one. I believed that all men are planted in youth with the seeds of greatness. But some fall upon stones and the birds of the air devour them; and some fall among brambles and are choked out by the growing thorns. But some fall in fertile soil and are rooted deep. Of such I believed myself to be. I felt that, like Virginia, I was not as the other reeds in the river. The magic hands of this woman could fashion me into a vibrant pipe to blow forth the sweetest harmonies. Immortal music, I doubted not, was imprisoned in my being; at her touch it would become vocal. This was the one woman I would have sought through all the world. She would water me from the wellsprings of her love and shine upon me with the sunlight of her beauty, and I should grow and blossom and fulfill my destiny. What a darling ass!

XI

VIRGINIA'S powers went deep in molding my pliant soul. Her gleaming personality penetrated me like actinic rays changing the very chemical balance of my body. Tighter and tighter grew the magnetic grip by which she held me. Virginia thought Roy Bradley was a genius. And such I was, in embryo. Her womanly intuition had picked me out as one destined to tread the star-dust of immortality. And so she had wished to cast adrift her ancient loves and hitch her wagon to a new constellation. She was able to feed me that spiritual inspiration for which I hungered. With sweet magic she instilled into my soul a sense of vast, unrealized power. She set my soul singing and mind reeling, drunk on her flattery.

"The first moment I ever saw you," she told me, "I felt a shock, a thrill that was almost electric. 'This is the man,' I said to myself. 'Here is my fate, my prince.' "

But she mined the lime out of me for the joy of seeing my spinal crash of disaster. Every new revelation about her lovers who preceded me was a drain on my spirit. She was determined to sap me until I crumbled—or rebelled and smote her with a blow. . . .

And yet her kisses charmed my senses, and an outpouring of that bubbled bliss that dashes forever on celestial shores, came rippling like a brimming river through our coupled hearts. Here was a woman whose soul was sheer

eroticism, wooing a youth whose being was tinctured with the spice of dreams. For I was fashioned of that sensitive stuff of which poets and prophets are born. I was delicately attuned to this siren's charm, so that the faintest zephyrs of the divine passion breathing upon the vibrant chords of my ego, threw off a melody. Virginia took up the harp of love and smote on all the strings.

They chimed; they sang; they rose like some pipe organ's tones through the cathedral of my being. And ever through their ringing I could hear the shadow-tones of some faint minor melody of grief. It was the banshee wail of memory, the ghost of my mother singing a requiem for the lost man of Wilber.

School days were ending; I was passing into the fog of sickness and melancholy. Virginia's husband had said to me: "How do you have the cold-blooded nerve?"

And I had answered like a Puritan Joseph, "Your woman is seducing me; not I her."

For it was true. When the time came that the aggressive ego should have laid hand upon her to gratify itself, I had placed my finger upon her knee and said, "The time has come." And the lady had said: "No, let our love be sublime, instead of earthly." And I had nobly obeyed. And that was the evening that we heard a crackling in the underbrush. The spy watching us had stepped back abashed. And well might that husband be abashed. He was really the lover and I the cheated spouse. . . .

Sublime matron pleading a second virgin purity!

Strange lover bowing to her poetic pretense!

But that twig snapping in the shadow was a glass crashing off stage in a farce harlequinade.

XII

IS Virginia's story the stock story of all the Yankee Madames Bovary of the prairie states?

She had a cruel father who out of mere perversity was a cattle rancher on the plains. Her mother longed for life, for art, beauty, intelligent society and died a thousand deaths on that Western desert. The daughter was gifted with a strange virtuosity in music. It was her consolation. And the prairies robbed her of this—the pony's foot in a badger hole.

Then she took up painting and went to the Chicago Art Institute. But previously she had married a young Kansan. Of Scotch descent, he had a rich uncle in Glasgow, she told me, who was to make this Kansas lad his heir. You see nothing is missing, not even the rich uncle. Her marriage to this lad had been—what shall I say—a whim, a mere yielding to his persuasion. She was too young to know what marriage meant. . . .

As she laid this tale bare before me, how my heart ached for her. Rambling through the woods, and listening to her rambling story I caught nothing but the poison ivy. . . . But when she began to paint in Chicago, she took hold of life again. And there she met a young artist from Texas who was all that she had dreamed of. He loved her. He was rich. They would fly to Paris. Her own husband had released her: "If you care more for him

than for me, go with him—" and she had purchased all her traveling things. Her lover showed her the two steamer tickets forwarded from Baltimore. On the day they were to leave Chicago, Virginia went to his studio. A dazzling girl was there.

"This is my bride from Texas; we are departing for Europe on our honeymoon."

Crushed again. He had betrayed Virginia. What could she do? All packed up and no one to travel with.

Her art left her, at this betrayal, even as her gift of music had vanished down the prairie-dog hole when her pony stepped in it.

(I was a trifle hazy as to just how the Texas artist and his plighted one had done this sleight of hand or rather slight o' Virginia, but I was mind-hazy on many things, being sick and dazzled with a glow of phthisis, and I took it on faith as the believer takes his "one-god-is-three" and "three-are-one.")

Anyway she was all packed up; now where could she go? It was back to Henry, who was about to enter the University of Kansas. And she entered with him.

There she had met my friend George Rock and under the magic of summer school and the madness of the midsummer moon she had flirted with him—or was it under the magic of the moon and the madness of summer school? No matter. Finally she found me.

After she had found me she told me more tales. Her husband had pledged himself to grant her freedom if at the end of their college course she had found some one that she liked better than him. I believed even this.

Then she began to torment me. "I am no better than

the woman of the street," she told me. "After a magic evening in the moonlight, with you, the ideal, the pure, the adorable one, I return to my wedded couch and to the embraces of one who is carnal and not spiritual."

Even now I do not sneer at her. God pity us all.

I thought her words were words of idealism. How could I know that she gratified a sexual relish by telling her pure lover that nightly she slept in her carnal husband's arms? She tortured me for her own delight. She devoured me in a perversity of conjugal affection as the lime-lacking sow in a perversity of motherhood devours its young pigs. She tortured me as my father tortured his wife. She consumed me as my father consumed his children.

Virginia drew me on and on to new agonies ever—if I was the god that brought love's fire to her from Heaven, she was the Heavenly condor that forever pecked out my liver for it. She told of orgies among the art students of Chicago. She had posed nude for her lover. It smote me like a whip in the face, but I stood up to it, and she relished my flagellation. She went on and on. Doubtless she lied like Engineer McGuire, telling me of lavender and lewdness in the great life, awful infamies that I had never dreamed of, but which her sweet body was exposed to. But always she was forced into these concupiscences by a relentless fate. She asked me to believe that her body in some mystic sense was pure like her soul despite the orgiastic intimacies she had known. And I swore she was pure and that I adored her, and would be faithful to her in my fashion—which was a terrible

fashion, since I was to be virtuous while my Cyndra lodged in the embraces of a thousand beasts.

When I began to spit blood, and a professor of science told me: "Bradley, we are trying out a new test for tuberculosis; you look like a death's head and must let us try the test on you; if you don't react the test is worthless," I was warmed by a deadening terror and refused to let them make the test. I told my deathless sweetheart, though, that the science department had sworn me to be doomed. Then suddenly she remembered that her duty was to her husband. While he never could understand her, still he was her husband and would suffer dumbly if she left him. She must forget her own wishes, she must sacrifice me. She must dedicate herself a votive offering upon the altar of wifely duty. From a sex vampire she had turned into a sweet social worker.

And yet to myself the aspiring poet, truly, was more important than the thwarted lover. My last moment with her was to sing myself to her as a virgin—the virgin prairie.

I AM THE PRAIRIE

I am the virgin prairie, bride of the sun and daughter of the sea.
I am the child of Chaos come to maturity.
In my blood is the salt of the past; the lime of fishes has made my bones.
Round are my limbs and broad my back,
And in my breast
Is the milk of wheat to give suck to the nations.

The hunters pass with the bison,
The herders go with the cattle;
The wagon and ox are a day . . and they perish.
The ringing steel is laid through the sod
And the Transcontinental Limited,
Gathers her skirts and runs for the Rockies.

The buffalo wallows grow up to grass again,
And the tractors plow them to wheat . . . .
But remember:
I fed the sea anemone when I was ooze,
And the sea is gone dry:
The buffalo that I fed are now forgotten.
I nourished the plowman's horse, and the plowshare passes.
I fed the men that marched in Georgia,
And half an inch beneath your plows
I hold the buried bones of older battle fields
Where the Mongolians slew the Mound Builders.

XIII

MY college days were now full of gestation and I was about to issue into life. When does life begin; at what point do we reach the world? The college had prepared me for this world and now I was about to be born.

Honor flows to the fat man, father had said. The stout-bellied are the elect of the earth. "With my brains and your belly," he had told Swede Linder, "I would become President."

Father was speaking truer than he knew. Had his intestine backed up his intellect he could have marched to the heights. Napoleon victualized his army, and crossed the Alps.

My brains were like my father's; my stomach was like his. Father spoke with confidence when he said his brains were as good as any in America. With a stomach to back him he could have conquered the world. But his inwards were the Pilgrim inwards, that crazy colon that caused half their numbers to die of indigestion and scurvy the first winter they were here. The viscera that does not digest and eliminate, brews poisons which it pours into the blood. These poisons are like opium, which creates delusions of grandeur. They are like hasheesh, which sends crazed men out to murder their neighbors. They are like morphine which saps the nerves till they are

paranoiac and men flee from imaginary pursuers—all the world turned devil and leagued to torment them.

Such was my father. He might have clowned it before a whole world and still have been sweet and happy. If he had had the courage of Mark Twain to push on as far as Twain did, he might have been a world-famed humorist before his soul sank back into the abyss of poisoned terror in which poor Mark Twain died. But my father lacked the stomach for that final lunge across the goal of life. So after having risen to be a Young Napoleon of the Short Grass he cast his eye up to the Alps above him, the "heights by great men reached and kept," and while gathering his forces to climb over that high barrier he wavered. That was all. The road of reality he trod no farther. Beyond the Alps lay Italy, but my father led his ragged forces there in dreams, only in dreams.

Out of that promising egg-of-man the superman was never fully born. It struggled to free itself, wounded itself and tried to crawl back into the egg. And so my father never came to birth. Birth is agonizing and some timid souls stand on the threshold of birth screaming in terror like a man in a dentist's chair wishing to be delivered of the aching tooth, yet clawing the dentist's forceps away and snorting with fear. My father is one of the unborn souls. He advanced to the gates of life and thrust his head out into the world of men. But he was afraid to go farther and he could not go back, so he stayed there forever squealing spiritually like a pig with its head caught under a gate.

So I finished my college course worn down from overwork and tuberculosis from a poor man's diet of starchy

foods and grease. I was told that city journalism was impossible for me. I must go to the country or die.

Father cooked a meagre supper of pancakes. But I had money to hire help, but he did not want to spend it. So I went to work for him, without wages, at the old Harrow farm, where he was still living alone in the old farmhouse which was far gone in the dilapidation of decay. Father was glad to see me and said that I had chosen the ideal life. I could work for him for my health and could earn my own spending money by writing humorous poetry on Sunday for the Kansas City Courier.

And sure enough I wrote the funny poems for the paper, glorifying life on the Kansas farm and making a joyful noise about it with my slambang wit. The clown seen laughing while his family woes devour his inwards—that was I. "Laugh, clown, laugh," has ever been my orders. And I have always obeyed.

My mother, on leaving Lawrence, had asked to come to father on the Harrow farm. But he had ordered her, with the younger children, to a farm near Kansas City. He tortured her fealty with the same delight that Virginia, the sex Borgia, had tortured me.

Father cooked a meager supper of pancakes. But I knew enough not to laugh if they tasted like shaving leather. We clowns who must laugh when we are in anguish are equally constrained not to laugh when the other fellow comes to woe.

When we had eaten supper, father began his usual self-pitying plaint, entirely illusory, that he was a much mistreated man.

I was a weak, pulpy young consumptive, but I flamed

to manhood for the moment, crying to my father in tones of command:

"Go in the house and write to mother to bring the children from the other farm and come here, and enclose a check for them to come on and I will mail it at once. They will be here on the next train. You are fooling yourself when you think that they would not follow you anywhere."

So mother again entered the old, decaying cottage where her younger years were spent in labor and toil, and now the last act was beginning and the mood had changed from toil and hope to heartache and despair.

There at her front door lay buried the little bones of her lost babies. But doubly lost were those who lived. The born dead, like the unborn, had escaped from him, but the living were to be gnawed at like a bone as long as the father lived to gnaw them, which was as long as they lived to be gnawed.

That night I dreamed out in every detail one of the folk tales making itself out of the grim prairie history. It was a familiar frontier mystery and the evidence came from the lips of the "bound" girl whom the unfortunate Kentucky family had brought to their sod-house in new Kansas . . . and in my memory the girl's testament made a poem entitled:

Night Sweat

Jim Archer and his boys Lige and Tom
Had beds in the loft;
Mrs. Archer was sick;
Her and me slept on the ground.

I woke up one morning when something dripped down in my
face;
Drip, drip, drip,
I looked up and the rafters were red.

Whoever done it had come in the night
And stabbed Jim and the boys to death,
Without wakenin' me and Sarah.
Jim didn't have no niggers,
All he had done was to talk pretty pert
To a free soil man the week before.

I woke choking with terror, weak and wet from a consumptive's heavy night sweat.

XIV

MEANWHILE what had become of the real poet in the Bradley family—Tom, the magic turnip, who had once run on his rickety pegs to prevent our slugger brother Johnnie from planting his deadly blow on me?

That lad had entered the University and quit in illness and brain-fog before the first term was over. He returned to father on the farm, the father who had made him a dreamer, and the farm on which he had lived his poisoned dreams . . . where he had beheaded a rooster in striking down a king . . . and had raked windrows of hay to defend Spain from the resurgent Moors.

Tom had turned twenty-one and father drove him off the farm crying: "Damned if you're worth your salt!" Tom married a Danish farm girl and with her dot he started to the City of Mexico to establish a socialist commonwealth there.

The money took them as far as Tahlequah, Old Indian Territory, where they lived in an abandoned log cabin and Tom borrowed money from our socialistic Aunt Annabelle. . . . Their baby was born in this cabin, and Tom quit writing poetry long enough to plant an acre or two of corn and vegetables. It was his first hand grasp toward reality, with his wife as prompter. . . . But it was the gesture of a dreaming man and there it ended. While the weeds and crab grass were choking his unhoed crop,

he and his child-nursing wife were living on coffee, bread and lard . . . more fairy food to turn children into fairy changelings . . . and Tom was writing a tactical and strategic review of the Mexican war *in Spanish!* His patient wife who entered nowise into his vast somnambulism, chided him about his neglected garden.

"I can't hoe them vegetables myself," she complained, "with a baby in my arms. You'd better go fight them weeds for people now on earth instead of fighting old dead-and-gone wars all over again."

Tom was fighting the old wars over again so that future generations would have no wars to fight. He complained petulantly that he could not farm at all unless he farmed on a magnificent scale. "I have to have at least ten men under me before I can function." His wife made no reply. She laid the baby on a square of cloth on the ground and went to hoeing the crop, dragging the baby along the row as she advanced. The Old World peasant blood in Tom's wife was vigorous, provident, unliterary. Her forebears in Germany and Denmark for thousands of years had practiced the tribal rite of sauerkraut. Cabbage is an anti-scorbutic for the fever of imagination because it kills the colon bacteria on which fancy is bred. It makes the body wholesome and drives out day dreams. It is death to Puritanism, for it makes the body lusty to consume the world. Because his mother couldn't get cabbage in Nebraska—father was too close-pursed to import it from the land where rain falls—Tom Bradley had come into the world an elfin child, born in hallucination to fight his rickety way through a battleground of phantoms.

XV

FATHER had told me that if I would "enter partnership" with him and help carry on his farms, he would strike a dividend at the end of a year and give me my share. Since he had seven farms containing more than a thousand acres he assured me that my share would be at least a thousand dollars. And so I worked for him, putting in fourteen hours a day in the fields and working all day Sunday writing humorous sketches for the Kansas City Courier. I was drugged and groggy from the lack of rest. Every morning as I dragged myself out of bed, I was sunk in such an agony of depression that I longed for death. But though the suicidal mania seized me regularly at that hazy hour of horror, at the same time I was momentarily paralyzed. When my strength returned the mood had passed.

And so I worked a year. Father said it was a great virtue thus to overtax my strength and flog my fainting spirit.

He did not take from me the money I earned by writing on Sunday as he had taken the dollar grandfather gave me in childhood. But before the year ended—which had been a fruitful and prosperous one, the harvests being unusually good—he announced that by deducting interest, depreciation, overhead and a thousand other "costs" he found there would be no profits to divide that year. Yet he claimed that Wall Street was tricky

and he hated it. There was still one month of the year yet to run, but I decided not to work it out, lest at the end of that time I should be owing him money. I felt no resentment toward him for thus exploiting the loyalty of a sick, hard-working and obedient boy.

I told him that I was going to Kansas City to seek work as a newspaper reporter. Then father advised me to stay with him and he would make me rich. I did not care for riches. Neither did I believe he would ever let me get hold of any money.

"You cannot make a living in the city," he said. "You will wear yourself out for small pay and then starve."

"I believe that I can climb in the journalistic field," I argued. "When I get to the top I will get a hundred dollars a week."

He laughed insultingly and predicted that I would never make a living. He had always taunted me that way. Why should I let it hurt me? He did not know that the dirty hovel he lived in was repulsive to me and that the food he served (nothing but bread, butter, potatoes, sugar and hog fat three times a day, year in and year out), had long ago destroyed my appetite and my bodily vigor. The more he belittled me the more determined I was to make a living in newspaper work.

Like Hank Sayer, I had broken an ax for father and was fleeing away to the wars.

"Stay here," he said wittily, "and in a few years you can be at the head of the finest herd of Poland China hogs in Kansas." I told him I was not equipped for the leadership of hogs. He laughed uproariously, seeing I had sensed the depth of his insult.

"All right," he said, as I started for the depot. "The time will come when you will be back here busted and hungry. I am only waiting as the years roll by and hoping against hope that some of my foolish boys will develop a grain of horse sense. If they do, my door is open to them, if they don't, I must simply charge them off to profit and loss."

One wonders why we did not catch the keynote of profit and loss in father's attitude toward his wife and children. Now at the age of forty-eight while still in the vigor of late youth, he had reached the point so common in fathers of the New England breed, where his only aim was to thwart his children, and prevent their getting away from him; and his only aim in keeping them with him was to try all the tallow out of their lives to grease his own wallet. But blinded by love and what the Greeks called filial piety we groped in a fog of anguish where we would not and could not see reality.

What a sardonic spectacle of the commonplace!

Gigantic drama of drab things!

BOOK THREE

I

I WAS still saturated with the sweet terror of Virginia, but was bent on living her down, as a drug addict suffers until the appetite has perished.

Every night when I closed my eyes, the haunting eyes of Virginia stared at me out of a dream and I awoke startled and shaken. The apparition seemed to float in air some two feet from my forehead. The sight of those eyes that once had soothed me, now terrified me. I had to open my own eyes and gaze at the starlit window opening on the sky, before the phantasmagoria could be shaken off. Its witchery haunted every cell of my body and covered me with gooseflesh like a chilling wind from a snow field.

Through weeks and months I battled with this night horror until I fought her out of my blood, out of my brain cells and nerve tissue, only to fall in love directly again with Isabel Fay, daughter of a neighboring farmer.

She was tall, handsome and reserved, her voice low and melodious. She was beautiful, romantic and wholesomely desirable. At any rate, Virginia had awakened in me an active need for and dependence upon womankind in the name of love. I took Isabel sleigh riding and to country literary society spelling matches, singing school and other farmer folk festivities. . . . Soon we were engaged. I had but one fear—my health. I wanted to "conquer in life's battles" and "crown my love with laurels." I was

ever a wordy, old-fashioned romanticist. My thoughts became winey with ancient resolves. I pledged myself to release her in case my health should break down, and if later it should be plain that I could not "win grandly for her," I declared fervently to myself that it would be my duty to end my life and let her quickly forget me while she still had the youth and beauty to attract "the worthy mate she deserved." Meantime, of course, I looked upon myself as the worthiest in the world. . . .

She was nineteen when we married. I introduced her to the Courier editors and such other personages as I had met in Kansas City and she had the same effect on them she had on me, the intimation of an unfathomable loveliness.

"How did a weakling like you," my friends asked, "ever attract such a woman as that?"

On her maternal side Isabel hailed from aristocratic Southern lineage. Sherman's depredations drove her folks to the unravished green lands of the West. In our mating a Magnolia of the South had mingled with the mad men from the Plymouth colony.

. . . . . .

Our wedding day was a fevered mist of foreboding. The realist watching from the back of my mind warned me of the wrong I was doing Isabel. All along I knew that my lungs were "weak." Yet my grandmother Alden had been tubercular and lost most of one lung, yet recovered and lived long. I clung to this precedent as giving hope in my case. At the same time I kept constantly in view the alternative of having to shoot myself in case my body did not cleanse itself. I prayed God to

give me one month of perfect, uncorrupted health in which to taste the cup dangled tantalizingly before my feverish lips, to have my joy of this perfect bride—and then I would go uncomplainingly to Hell forever.

But on the morning of the wedding I had a violent hemorrhage, and yet I went to the house of my bride and married her—highly resolved to be her platonic companion until my disease was at last vanquished. . . . For a whole year I did not as much as kiss my bride . . . and I turned my eyes from the honest temptation of her bare lovely arms . . . believing myself nobler than St. Anthony . . . completely rationalizing the great wrong I had done her. . . . But in all truth let me say: that long year of probation and mortification in waiting on the threshold of love's joy and doom warped me forever. . . .

Natural affection was become heinous sin—some indescribable affront to the Holy Ghost.

. . . . . .

I was a cub reporter on the Kansas City Courier. I started out with some stumbling stupidities that are still comical traditions there, but I compensated for them by strokes of great aptitude, and I got on rapidly. I worked the long hard cub's grind, sticking my nose into everything. . . . Meantime, my body grumbled in protest against celibacy.

Came an evening when one of my old classmates, now a preacher, looked me up and said: "I have been preaching in Oskanonie for a year, and the effort of being a model of virtue for those farmers is too much for me. I have been good as long as I can, at one stretch. Let's get a

quart of whiskey and a couple of big blondes, and make a night of it."

I assented. The old-fashioned, knightly romanticist in me considered a courtesan a legitimate victim—even of tuberculosis germs. . . .

The next morning when we awoke we felt the usual regret over our debauch. The Kansas preacher began crying and bemoaning his sins. I told him: "Now shut up before I give you a poke on the jaw. You suggested this spree. We should have thought of this repentance stuff before we started out. But let there be no tears now."

I confess my weakness and asininities, but I do not weep over them. I apologize, but I laugh. The man who repents for being human is not quite human. He is the kind who will pay the Nordic priests ten dollars to be admitted to the One Great Race.

Virginia, my old love, lived in Kansas City, and when she found I was winning journalistic fame, she came to me and told me that she had ever been true to me and at last her husband had divorced her.

She was ready for me now. And how I gloated in telling her—"too late—too late—my girl." Of course, I was very, very dramatic—and also exceedingly tempted as she began pleading with her old vampire tricks. I told her, "I am not worth competing for. You've lost. The other girl won."

She pleaded all the more and to prove to myself that I was a he-man I knocked her over with a blow.

My liberal Aunt Annabelle was shocked at this and told me never to confess it.

I think it was one of the best things I ever did.

II

I WAS married and was not receiving even a laborer's living wage. The owner of the paper told me: "You are now so far advanced that you are more competent to give yourself assignments than others are to direct you, and hereafter you may go where you please and write what you find to write about, and turn it in to me." Yet my salary was only twenty-five dollars a week, which was less than half the salary of any other editor on the paper. I had brought this about, myself, for I had been petulant in demanding better pay, and while the owner was willing to advance me and give free scope to my abilities, he was determined to discipline me as to my peevish and rebellious approach on the matter of compensation. He said: "You are the hardest worker on the staff and the only man whose talent I would call genius. Now if you can just quell that insurgency in your spirit you will have proven to me your value, and there is no limit to how high you will go on the pay roll."

My father continued to write me from time to time inquiring sarcastically if I were getting rich. Two years had passed. I was married and there was now a baby girl, and so my twenty-five dollars a week was a mere subsistence. His hint that I could not make a living maddened me.

I left the Courier and became managing editor of a newly launched daily in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at the salary of eighteen dollars a week. There, through the writing of advertisements, the promotion of prize fights and the writing of love letters at seven dollars a letter for men who were courting heiresses, I did very well and was happy. The paper thrived under my editorship and it was on its feet as a going concern when I wearied of the hard work and moved into the heart of the Arkansas mountains to live in the virgin forest and amidst the wild beauties of nature which I loved and the pine-scented air which my weary body was famishing for.

I cleared a small farm and raised an abundance of peanuts, popcorn and garden truck. Apples and peaches grow on every stick in that land and the people are simple, generous and "neighborly." One of the Oklahomans for whom I had written love letters sent me a barrel of bottled beer and a case of champagne wine as a token that he had married the heiress and had not forgotten my hand in the affair. I was writing verse and humor for the Kansas City Sunday Courier and earning from sixty to seventy dollars a month, my sole cash income. A reporter for the Courier came down and visited me. I shared with him my food and beverages and lent him five dollars at his request when he departed. He returned and told the editors that I was "living like a country squire" with hams, melons, honey, cigars and sparkling wines at four dollars a bottle, and that all this was coming out of the Courier, and that as long as I could live in such opulence and luxury by writing a few lines for the paper I would certainly never return and take a desk job. The

Sunday editor wrote to me that he had been ordered to cut my rate of pay in two. The injustice of this act, which I attributed to envy and malice, again drove me into a muddle of despondency.

III

I BRUSHED my threadbare Sunday clothes, packed my cheap valise and with my remaining cash, some twenty-nine dollars, I set forth in search of another job. I could not continue writing humor for the Kansas City Courier at the new schedule of half-pay, because anger at my fellow Kansans, the editors who had pruned me, paralyzed my undisciplined will. The test of a real humorist is that he can laugh at himself when he gets a licking. I flunked in this testing, I cried out in spiritual rebellion: "Why do they always punish me by taking the bread out of our mouths?" Physical flogging I could have stood without squealing, for I have endured fist fight punishment and dental and surgical operations without panic, but to prevent my making a living for my wife and child was to strike one vulnerable and mortal nerve and throw my cowardly spirit into spasms. That nerve had been tapped so long by my father that when fellow journalists smote the same nerve I gave the coward's cry for "Economic Security!" Before me swam the Federal roast turkey, that fair mirage of the stomach's eye that turns all weaklings into socialists.

I went to a socialist weekly with a million circulation published in Rawley, Kansas, called the *Cry of Realism.* Here I was given a place as associate editor at forty dollars a week, the biggest salary that I had ever been paid.

In the office of the *Cry* I learned the entire rigmarole

of radicalism. I smiled at the absurdity of much of it, for its basis on human cowardice was apparent, but other tenets of it I accepted as a true protest against tyranny.

I was led into socialism by what appeared to me to be the fact and the logic of experience. The mysticism of the cult was alien to me at this time.

The leading mystic of the *Cry of Realism* was Johnson J. Turner, editor in chief. Comrade Turner gave me a copy of his book, "The World To Be," the typography of which was like the Bible. His book was the new Gospel, he told me, and it would eventually supplant the older Bible. Turner believed that he was the Messiah, and he was the type of ineffectual person called a weak sister.

Labor for bread was the supreme curse of man, said Turner's Bible. Eating, or the necessity for food, was what caused man to toil. He was much distressed because man had to work or starve, and because employers had to urge their employes to work and because husbandmen had to "enslave the beasts," that is, compel horses and oxen to work.

"Do you know the biggest annual crop in America?" he asked me.

"What is it?" I parried.

"Hay," he exclaimed significantly. Then, searching me with his mild blue eyes he saw that I missed its significance.

"Don't you know what that means?" he asked. "It means that the enslavement of the beasts is one of the biggest facts in American capitalism. No hay is eaten by humans. It is the beasts of burden that eat all the hay. And the fact that hay is the biggest crop raised in

America shows with startling vividness what vast armies of beasts are now enslaved."

Later I was to learn that the fodder was raised for our armies of asses.

Under the socialist commonwealth after the coming of the *new realm,* the curse of man's earning his own food and compelling other men and beasts to earn theirs would be lifted. Men, having developed their godlike functions, would draw nourishment direct from the air. They would eat by breathing the succulent atmosphere, drawing the nitrogen, carbon and salts from the air they inhaled and turning them to bread, butter and cheese in the stomach.

Several thousand advanced Americans who were irked by manual labor but were still willing to breathe if that were all that one need do to sustain life and a full stomach, purchased Comrade Turner's Bible at a dollar a copy and thus enabled him to continue eating in the old style, pending alterations. It was the religionists' dream of manna. The religious ideal, like the socialist ideal, is the articulation of the cry of the fœtus for free food, its lusty longing for unearned nutriment poured directly from its mother's heart into its belly. It is democracy's cry for Federal Aid, even as it was Republican Rome's clamor for free corn.

This was making a socialist of me and eventually it whelmed my dazed and dying ego into soothing mysticism into which all baffled tribal urges finally go. Thus socialism is not science but mysticism, just as Americanism is mysticism and the Yankee race is mysticism. And although socialism hates religion, it is the same goblin in a

different form. Both are a retreat from reality and a dream of the return into the egg. Socialism has its deities and its devils, its evil enchantments and its magic rites that break the enchantment, its white Knights and its black adversaries, its trials of the flesh that must end at last in victory; its final reward is *Economic Security*, that fabulous Heaven where the stomach will be always glutted and no grocer's bill to pay. The alimentary canal, being always troubled, creates the American's dream and his heaven. His heaven is not the shadow of a soul on fire but the shadow of an intestine in desire. The mind is the flesh and since the flesh has two functions, to replace itself by aliment and to reproduce itself by sexualism, this dual flesh is mirrored by a dual mind.

The oriental, having a bowel superior to the occidental's, does not dream of a heaven in which his viscera will cease to be unhappy. His heaven is filled with luscious maidens.

The American's angels are sexless, but they serve the free manna that will comfort his interior.

"Bread of Heaven," pleads the hymn, "feed me till I want no more."

IV

I TOLD Comrade Turner of the *Cry of Realism* that my salary was forty dollars a week. He had a temperamental convulsion. In this agonizing fit the exact nature of his feelings I do not know. Whether they were envy, chagrin, malice or anger, the facial evidence of his emotional blow-up was painful to see. When he recovered himself so far as to be able to talk weakly he explained his plight:

"I have been here for years and am the mainstay of the paper. Yet you come here and receive a salary to start with that is five dollars a week more than I am getting. I started in at twenty dollars a week and by years of slaving have worked up to thirty-five."

"Why don't you go to the boss and tell him you want forty a week or you will quit?" I suggested. "If you are the mainstay of the paper he will have to come across. Have you ever asked him for it?"

"No."

"Well, of course he isn't going to pay you more than you ask for."

"I can't ask him for it," said the futile man with a sigh of sympathy for his weakness. "That is one thing I never could do—stand up for my rights."

I saw at once why he was a dream-god; he was not strong enough to be a man. In his stomach-dream-heaven

he was almighty because he had no stomach courage on earth.

"Tom Redding knows that I cannot speak out and demand my rights," he continued, "therefore he oppresses me." He then went on to relate the long story of his wrongs. Tom Redding was the publisher of the *Cry* and the profits of the publication went into his pocket. It had made him rich. Yet Comrade Turner would have been a part owner in the paper and would have been rich too, had not the craftier Tom Redding induced him by false representations to sell his share. Tom Redding was a grasping, cynical socialist, according to Turner's plaint, who was working for his own pocket as well as for the Cause. He had saddled Comrade Turner, the real prophet of the Coming Day, and with boots and spurs he had ridden this Brother like an enslaved beast year after year and there was yet no rest in sight.

So that was why Comrade Turner, the dream-god, pitied the ox and the ass and wept for the miseries of the animal world, for he was a hybrid of both.

The *Cry of Realism* was the first Kansas newspaper to dispense with the telegraph operator and receive all its "telegraph" news by telepathy. This innovation was to be credited to Comrade Turner. He used to go into a trance, receive all the news from throughout the world touching on socialist interests, then come out of his trance and edit the "telegraph" thus received. He said that the plutocratic press could hire a good clairvoyant like himself and get all their news without paying telegraph and cable tolls but the plutocrats having money invested in all these utilities compelled the papers to use them, thus

saddling another crushing burden of costs upon the down-trodden people.

It was at the time of the trial of two union labor agents charged with dynamiting a Los Angeles newspaper. The *Cry of Realism* had sent a special correspondent to Los Angeles to learn who really dynamited the newspaper. This reporter reached Los Angeles and failed to make a report. Comrade Turner went into a trance and received dispatches by telepathy telling what had happened to the *Cry's* honest investigator. The psychic dispatches said that the reporter had arrived and discovered conclusive evidence that the plutocrats blew up their paper (killing many of themselves) in order to lay the crime at labor's door! The plutocrats then finding themselves on the point of exposure by the honest socialist investigator did then commission a detective agency to direct their operatives to murder an honest reporter and destroy the typewritten story he had in his pocket. The dispatch as printed in the *Cry* described the detectives and told where they cornered the reporter, how they hit him in the head with a bludgeon, carried him, bloody and unconscious, out into the bay in a row boat at night and flung his body to the sharks. A description of the fish-gnawed bones on the bottom of the bay was given.

This aroused so much indignation throughout Kansas and other sections of America where the enemies of Wall Street were indigenous, that the circulation of the *Cry* was greatly increased. These virtuous people knew of but one way of curbing the atrocities of Wall Street and that was by increasing the circulation of the *Cry of Realism.* Not long thereafter the hell hounds of the pluto-

cratic press nosed out the whereabouts of the murdered man. He had not been dead but merely drunken. A letter came to the *Cry* saying that it was the editor's fault that his reporter did all of his special investigation in a bawdy resort. They knew he was susceptible to the charm of lewd ladies and should never have sent him into such a sink of iniquity as California. The letter was unsigned.

This sudden fizzle of the great Wall Street Murder was disastrous to the socialist paper, many thousands of its dupes denouncing it and canceling their subscriptions. I was dismissed from the staff.

I went back to Kansas City and was given a place on the Kansas City *Register* at thirty dollars a week.

My first assignment was to write a story of the experiences of a normal journalist on a crank newspaper. I wrote a careful account of some of the novel features of socialist journalism, emphasizing such points as that the *Cry*, a Kansas country town weekly with a million circulation, was the largest political journal in the world, that it had an army of 30,000 volunteer, unpaid subscription agents who worked free because of their fanatical zeal, and that the editor of this paper regarded its work as having been done, its mission performed and was going to scrap it—that is, obliterate the enterprise instead of selling it as a capitalist would do. I made no mention of the telepathic dispatches and other ridiculous features that might bring the editor into contempt. I had no malice to vent and no wish to court a libel suit.

No sooner had the paper appeared on the street than the socialist editor who happened to be in town that day telephoned to the *Register* that he was filing a suit for

$200,000 damages against it for printing a lie. He further said he knew who sent them this dispatch. He said it had come from their Washington correspondent who had been hired by Wall Street to send it. He said he knew of this plot in advance, as his spies had informed him that Wall Street in its desperation had resolved on this coup to force the *Cry* to quit.

I had finished writing the story at eleven o'clock in the morning and by noon the damage suit was announced. I went out to lunch with the understanding that I need not return. The sub-editor who ordered me to write the story had told the responsible editor that I had slipped the story over on him by stealth. His betrayal of me set me wild again with rebellion and self-pity, and in the drunken grandeur of despair, with tears streaming from my eyes as fast as I could dash them away, I went to the editors and said: "You have all turned on me in a moment because you are too cowardly to face the barking of a dog. I wrote that story at your command and you printed it of your own free will. Now you say I wrote it secretly and slipped it into your paper when you weren't looking. Be men, stand up and take the gaff. I'm a man. I take the gaff. I stand here facing you and take my medicine. I know that I haven't got a friend in the world except a harried woman and her baby down in the mountain wilderness of Arkansas. Good-by. I am going to New York. I leave you knowing well that I have not a friend in the world. I am going among strangers. I hope that there I shall find justice."

I returned to Arkansas and chopped enough wood to last my wife two months, left her enough flour, meat and

matches for that period, and borrowing $200 from a mountaineer capitalist who took only my word as security, I kissed my wife and baby good-by and set off again upon a desperate gamble for bread.

V

WHEN I arrived in New York, which was on a bright morning in early spring, I rented a room on West Ninety-sixth Street and began writing my essays.

The effect of the towering city on my rustic senses was to stimulate me immensely. New York was the ivory castle of my dreams. I wrote:

> New York! She sips with her coral lips
> The wine of the upper air,
> Her white arms shouldering back the stars
> That hover around her hair.

My landlady was of the old middle-class American stock and had lived all her life in New York City without having met with more than two unusual things, both of which she related to me. One time a school teacher, a man who was the instructor of her son, visited at her house and stayed all night. He insisted on sleeping with the son, and in the night they had fought. The son explained: "He kissed me, and I kicked him out of bed."

The son was a good singer but would not work. His mother insisted that he use his talent to earn a living, so he finally joined the road company of a New York musical "success," as they then called it. He soon returned to live with his mother. He explained: "My voice is so good that it makes all the other voices in the cast sound

too tin-panny. So it was cheaper to tie a can to me than to fire all those other tin-panners." His mother believed this explanation, although she never forgave him for spending the rest of his life as a loafer. Various Broadway actors supported him as long as he was young and good looking.

One day Harry Howe called for me, and we gathered up the Kansas City crowd and went to the Follies to hear Bert Williams, a negro comedian from Lawrence, Kansas. It was just after Howe's notorious romance that had made his name familiar to the reader of newspaper headlines. My landlady was greatly excited. "So that was Harry Howe," she exclaimed. "A real celebrity was a visitor in my house. I wish my husband could have seen him, too. It is the biggest event that has happened in years. I never thought I would live to see such a celebrity in my house."

I realized that one could live in New York all one's life and not be of New York—to live there as dully as the yokel in the Kansas cornfields. To me, everything in the city was exciting, that is, everything except the fellows from Kansas. But to my landlady a man from Kansas was the bolt of lightning and the thunder crash that had never jarred her house before.

One day while I was going to the Subway entrance at Ninety-sixth Street, a fire truck went by with clanging bell. A plump young woman, over-fed and over-dressed, left a soda fountain and stepped out onto the sidewalk with a glass and spoon in her hands and, peering at the fire truck, jumped wildly up and down exclaiming: "Oh, I love excitement! I love excitement!"

Every one must be his own judge of what excites him. A passing fire truck was no excitement to me. But everything else had whipped up my senses to exhilaration—the endless miracle of the Subway, the striking types that crowded upper Broadway, the woman dancing on fat toes and thinking she was excited—these were the exciting things to me.

I had not yet completed six of my essays, and was working rapidly to finish that number so that I might try to find a market for them and so earn some money. I could see the faces of my wife and baby afar in those lonesome Ozark hills and I knew they were praying for me with the heart's unutterable yearning. And I had money enough for only two weeks when I reached New York. I must win in fourteen days or sink in irretrievable disaster. I was more than a thousand miles from my wife and she had food and fuel only for a month or two; when that was gone there was none to whom she could turn. My father would have taken her to his desolate farm and sweated her bones under the coarsest, hardest labor, chuckling and jibing at her and at the fool she had married. She would not have submitted to it, preferring death instead. I had to win; I dared not contemplate my plight should it spell failure.

"Take your Arkansas stuff to the Evening *Letter*," advised Charley Stone. "That's your best chance."

The *Letter* accepted it and put me on the staff at thirty dollars a week. I was given a desk in a little room adjoining similar cubby holes in which labored "Rube" Levy and the famous columnist known to his worshiping fans as K. I. K.

VI

K. I. K. was a brilliant young Jew from Chicago who had a pleasing set of Nordic names—Kenneth Irving Kenyon. I mean they were pleasing to him. He was fond of the Massachusetts Puritan culture and was the militant leader of the Harvard tradition. He had not attended Harvard and was not a member of the Puritan race. It was a case of transferred personality; he identified himself with the cultivated Nordics issuing from underneath the Harvard elms, just as Socialist Turner identified himself with the beasts of burden staggering under the farmer's lash.

Why so brilliant an alien should choose to be the champion of the Harvard crowd I could not understand, unless it was because the Harvard teaching is snobbery, and Kenyon wished to heighten his humorous character by pretending to be a literary snob. It was a shrewd pose on his part for it drew all the educated weaklings into his train, it being easier to join his standard than to withstand the slings and arrows of his witty scorn. I admired his abilities and was charitable toward his weaknesses and hoped that he would treat me in the same manner. I was tired of the everlasting pecking at my inferiority by my father's stinging satires and hoped that in New York I would be protected by a more tolerant sophistication.

But it was the jest of fate that I should sell my Arkansas rustic philosophy to the Evening *Letter* and thus

begin braying my barbaric yawpings in the oversensitive ears of K. I. K. With nervous trepidation I awaited his verdict on my essays; he was noted for extending a helping hand to all the ambitious young fellows who were imitating him. I believed he would see a strain of sincerity and originality in my attempted criticism of life. But when he said my work was "old stuff, hick stuff, bush league stuff," it was as if he had treated the carbuncle on my ego's neck to a blow from a sledge hammer.

Besides writing my humorous column the duties of exchange editor were assigned to me and I had to go to K. I. K. to get the exchanges to clip after he was through with them. It was on my first trip to his desk to get the papers that I had asked him what he thought of my column.

"It is as long and as wide as anybody's column," he replied.

My nerves tightened with a stunned agony. It was the first time I had met with a newspaper man who was willing to give me a scathing answer loaded with potential insult if I chose to accept the insult.

It was a brave risk for Kenyon to take. For should his estimate prove wrong and should I ever win my literary spurs I would be justified in jabbing his own galled flanks until he winced as I had done.

From the moment that he stung me with his first jibe I began fusing his personality with that of my father.

Then it began to seem that K. I. K. was of my own flesh and blood and that I must loyally love him and admire the brilliance of his mind no matter how much I winced beneath the torment of his scorn. So I assumed a

stoicism and never answered him in kind. Each morning when I went for the papers I would pass some pleasant remark to show I was not sullen, and every time his quick mind would fling back an answering jibe that stung like the blister of a cattle whip. Sometimes others of the staff were present when these remarks were flying—perhaps some stupid, pompous political reporter or a hack from the stage and screen department—too dull to catch the meaning of the repartee and they would join in the conversation only to be snagged like bulls in a barbed wire entanglement. While the master mind was using his skill to extricate them I would throw a few barbs into their hides, though they were too thick to know it. But I never permitted myself the audacity to be insolent to K. I. K. This repression was crowded down into my diaphragm where smoldered my resentment toward my father and the two mated in a nightmare that finally shook me to pieces.

VII

NEW YORK struck me as the metropolis of American insincerity. At that time the foreign colonies were mere colonies and the old stock Americans still predominated. But already one could perceive that their dominance was doomed.

I called myself the last of the Americans; and I regarded the engulfment and obliteration of my tribe as a jolly curtainfall upon one act in the cosmic comedy.

All the Western Americans in New York were working hard at the trade of being Easterners . . . in the best Harvard tradition. The Eastern Americans were busied at the task of being Londoners. And then I remembered that the Londoner's cry was: "Ship me somewhere East of Suez." All tribes were longing to be and pretending to be something that they were not. The Westward march of the Nordics was over. For a thousand years they had been pressing into new wildernesses and founding new frontier societies in an effort to be big men. My ancestors had come from England to be big men in raw Massachusetts. The Massachusetts underlings had later gone west to be big medicine men in raw states like Illinois and Wisconsin. Now the frontier was vanished and the frontier ideal was perished with it. The Davy Crocketts and General Jacksons and other *have-saw* dignitaries from *I-done-it* states were no longer able to up-

holster their rude pride with the trappings of a false-front aristocracy.

So now the raw Westerner who envied the Easterner was pretending to be one. The Easterner, envious of the superior Londoner, was pretending to be an Englishman. And the Englishman was yearning to be a Maharajah of India.

A young man from Chicago had become prominent in New York newspaper life. He had learned to write and act in the manner of a Harvard graduate and he was fast becoming the leader of the Harvard Kulture. My Kansas City friends were using him as their model in learning to ape the Harvard tradition.

But I refused to take malacca stick and gloves and learn to use the Harvard accent. I had given Harvard its full credit in Kansas where my tribe discredited it and derided it. But I was not going to play the ape. I was a raw Westerner and I would confess I was a raw Westerner and if a raw Westerner were no good in this world, then to hell with me.

Still regarding myself as the last of the Americans, a man molded in the Davy Crockett tradition, I began jotting down my impressions of the new age in a series of crude essays under the general head of "An Arkansas Man on Broadway."

I compared the barefoot dancer of the Follies with the barefoot women tramping in to church in the Ozark hills, one baring her feet for money, the other going barefoot for the lack of it. When the mountain man had extra money he bought shoes and stockings for his women; when the city man had spare change he spent it to pay

women for taking off their shoes and stockings to display their white flesh. For the city man, the material world was all conquered and he was seeking adventure in the sensual world. In my Arkansas hills the physical was still unsubdued, men were still hewing the wood of fact and had not yet entered the mystic forest of sense and mind. Their To-day was New York's Yesterday; I had stepped from a nation's past into its present. I was the last of the Coonskin Americans, the living ancestor of Broadway, an anachronism from the pioneer period here walking in the age of jazz.

And as I was only important as I could make the past important, I tried to ritualize the Past.

In this Story of an Ass I intend to give the autobiography not only of an individual but of the tribe. I am a sort of diabolical messiah. As Jesus in his perfection points to perfection for the whole race, so I in my asininity would indicate that we of the Puritan tradition are asses all.

VIII

WHEN I entered New York journalism as "The Man from Arkansas" I declared that I was the last American; a new age had come and I was not of it. I said I was the contemporaneous ancestor of this present nation. I had always regarded myself as a symbol more than an individual. I symbolized the American tribe, and the summing up of my life would be the summing up of the racial evidence, and the verdict against me individually would also be the jury's verdict against my race.

Even in childhood I was bent toward this symbolism.

I drew on a single sheet of bristol board the life-sized heads of grandfather and grandmother. As a background for these portraits I put in a design of green bladed waving Indian corn to symbolize their lifetime spent in tilling the American soil. But my grandmother, who was a Plymouth Rock Alden, didn't care for the peasant symbolism, neither did any of her children. They were not proud of their cornfield career. The background they chose to see in the picture was shadowly composed of ducal parks and old ancestral halls—sweet self-kidding.

America made that psychological word because it needed a name for the type of man who deliberately deceives himself, who avoids reality and clings to the dream because reality rates him as a private in the ranks of life while in the dream he can be a Napoleon.

The Nordic race (which is purely fabulous) is probably the only race that was ever erected as a monument to self-kidding.

The ancient Hebrew prophets started out to kid Israel as the Chosen People; but centuries of hard luck made the Jew accept realism as his working philosophy and he set aside certain days in the year on which to do all his self-kidding as an emotionalized festivity. Because the Jew accepts reality he is a real power in the world. Reality is the thing the American fears and hates. He clings to the tribal dream and worships the great Dream race. The regalia of our race is appropriately a bed sheet and a night cap pulled down over the eyes, and our totem pole a thing that blazes by night, but in the morning it is seen to have vanished into smoke.

I name the great delusions of my people and show how they are rooted in our tribal nature. That we survive I attribute to the German corpuscles in our blood which we inherited from our mother, a descendant of the Pennsylvania "Dutch." This racial stock was meek and industrious and had no delusions of grandeur.

The struggle in my own veins of these few "Dutch" corpuscles ridden down, cheated, brow-beaten and bedeviled by the Puritan corpuscles made the drama of my inner life which I now give to the outer world as a symbol of the American conflict now ending in the Puritan debacle.

Puritanism, which is merely the fear of life and the desire to retreat into the egg, is surely doomed in America because the men who do not fear life are becoming more numerous than the men who do. The sleep-walking tribe

cannot push back the advancing tribes that are awake. When my father ceased advancing when the vastness of reality emphasized his own smallness, he began retreating into the egg.

The Nordic race craze is nothing but a tribe's retreat into its ancestry. It is crawling back into the womb of time, wrapping the caul around its head and lying down to pleasant dreams.

The Puritan fears life, he fears the struggle and defeat. His stomach is not at peace with his food. He fears he is not healthy enough to make a living; hence his dream of Federal aid. He sees his competitors as demons, hence he lifts his Nordic tribal totem pole and prays to it to exorcise all rival tribes or foreigners.

IX

DAY by day the new demon of inferiority terrified me more and more.

A new thread of plot had run into the drama of my life struggle. I must now not only conquer my father's enmity and show him that I could make a living but I must break K. I. K.'s hostility and show him that I had new stuff to write.

Kenyon's genius lay in parody. And since parody must paraphrase the existing modes, the existing traditions, Kenyon naturally had a selfish interest in maintaining the *status quo*. It was this motive and not an imitative servility that had made him a champion of the Harvard tradition. The Harvard tradition prevailed in American letters, and the prevailing tradition is the only one that offers meat for the parodist.

The Harvard tradition is merely a tribal propaganda, and the tribe is dying. It had no special worth. Most of the New York magazines were edited by Harvard men, and they conducted them in the Harvard tradition, and the magazines were not sustained by it. In fact they were then dying of it and now they are dead. A few have been resuscitated by the beer and bologna vitality of Menckenism.

I had come out of the Kansas culture, which is a derivation of the Harvard culture because the Kansans are

derived from the Puritan tribe. And this Kansas culture with its hatred of the superior man, and its belief in magic, clairvoyance, food from the atmosphere, Federal aid from governmental Santa Clauses and its identifying itself with the downtrodden beasts under a cruel master, was a tribal propaganda that forever disgusted me with all tribal propagandas. It made me the enemy of the Harvard voodoo as I was of the Kansas voodoo. The Harvardized literature and magazines in New York I knew must perish due to the increase of realistic intellects in the metropolis—many of them native but most of them from the "foreign invasion." I threw a few sarcastic javelins into the hide of Harvardism. Perhaps I was like the brave ass that kicked the dying lion.

Men like H. L. Mencken were beginning to lead a culture that was realistic and therefore universal and not the hallucination of any tribal group. I was fighting in those ranks. And so I aroused the tribal fury of the Harvardites who marched like a parade of come-ons behind the band wagon of Old Doc K. I. K.

I felt lonely in New York and pined for the hills. I used to go to the edge of town and walk until I came to farm houses. The sight of them eased my heart's longing. But as I pressed farther on I would find that the farm houses were only relics in the midst of a park and I would emerge into a wilderness of brick walls and fire-escapes again. I was in a heart-flutter of fear in alien meadows and I ached with an endless yearning for my own stubblefield.

It took real scrimping to save two hundred dollars and pay off that ninety-day loan, and I lived on next to noth-

ing. Harry Howe, poor fellow, was then making an average of five dollars a week by selling four epigrams a month to the Society Set magazine and a monthly poem to a similar magazine of cruder appeal. All the other magazines barred his work because of his sex experience and he was slowly starving. He looked ghastly as a death's head and his eye was fevered. One fifteen-cent meal a day was all he could afford and he had found a place in the Bowery where he could get meat, bread, potatoes and coffee for that sum, terrible stuff. It made me believe that Howe was born to be hanged and nothing else would kill him. He was a sublime liar and declared he liked his fare and that if he had a million dollars he would continue to spend only five dollars a week on board and lodging.

He had been offered several hundred dollars to write a sensational account of his love affair but he was still under the glamorous spell of it; he refused to write it "because it would hurt somebody's feelings." All of the Kansas City colony liked Howe, for although he was boisterous and a born showman, there was no peevishness nor backbiting in him. He would walk seven miles across the town to tell a friend that the editor of this or that magazine was in the market for an article that Howe believed his friend could write. He did this through good fellowship and not for any reward.

After I had paid off the loan it took further weeks of penurious saving to get enough money to bring my wife and baby to me, and when I saw their faces amid the myriad alien figures of the great city I was transported

with an ecstasy which to remember after a dozen years is still delightful.

We took a furnished apartment on 104th Street where rents were cheap and the neighborhood noisy and disreputable, and there our thirty dollars a week sufficed for the bare necessities of life. But I was full of hope. My column had proven successful and had a following on Broadway and among business men though not among the "intellectuals." I asked the managing editor for more pay and he said, "I have you in mind, and when adjustments are made in the fall there will be something big for you." I had not yet learned business diplomacy, either to practice it or to understand it when others practiced it upon me. "Something big for me in the fall" might have meant a big disappointment. And that's what it did mean, although I took it to mean a big increase in pay, as the editor knew I would. After all, he had given me the one thing that probably no one else would have given me, an entrée into New York. How priceless it was. But I did not value it. I was obsessed with a sullen mania because I could not earn a decent living even after I had made a "New York success."

I went to the Associated Newspapers, a buying syndicate for the Kansas City Courier and thirty other leading papers throughout the country. Their agent, J. J. McCabe, told me that he liked my features and asked my price. I named a hundred dollars a week and he thought it reasonable. He made a preliminary agreement with me and said it would have to be signed or O.K.'d by three directors of the syndicate, among which was the managing editor of the Kansas City Courier. The Boston and

New York directors endorsed the deal but my old chief in Kansas City vetoed it on the ground that the price was much more than I had been accustomed to getting. Because I had never earned a living I now had no right to earn one! It was a spear stab into the festering soreness in my heart, and now the pus ran out and poisoned me entirely. There was not a shred of sane flesh in my body. I had the delusion that I was persecuted, so I became a dream-god like comrade Turner. I was a tortured prophet, a messiah doomed. I had come up from my oppressed hinterland, an inspired peasant, a shining one, a Jesus with parables upon my lips and the truth that sets men free. And though I came to the capital riding on an ass, the common people had heard me gladly. But the men in power, the Pharisees, the rich and cynical ones, had crucified me.

It was ordained (so ran my obsession) from the beginning of the world that I was to be sacrificed. No matter how near I might come to the cup of victory it was always to be dashed from my lips. For me it was the hemlock. Vainly might I pray to God to let this cup of bitterness pass, I yet must drain it to the dregs; for me there was only the dash of vinegar upon my lips, the nails of the cross in my hands and the spear thrust through my bladder.

I had been a natural pagan and infidel; the woods had been my shrine and I had never found a taste of nutriment in the church. But now out of my own weakness, cowardliness and defeat I created the Christian religion in a moment. While life was luring me I had known a pagan zest for life. But now that I was whipped, I cre-

ated a glow about myself as a worm secretes phosphorus. And this glow that I myself had created took on the form of the Christian Fable, which Nietzsche has well called a religion of cowards and slaves.

X

JUST at this time I received word that my mother had been thrown out of a cart by a runaway farm horse and had sustained a broken leg. My sister wrote that mother had all but given up life's struggle even before this accident. The old house had rotted down above her and all the children had gone out into the world and had been unsuccessful and father had refused to rebuild the rotten house or to move into a warmer land. He spent his time complaining that mother had never been any help to him and that he had raised a family of fools and it was all her fault for she had taught them folly and now her foolish brood was scattered, busted, down and out and he was damn glad of it.

In this atmosphere the defeated mother lay with a broken leg and a broken heart. My sister, who had been driven away by father's curses at her "incompetence" and was teaching school in a near-by town, had gone back to care for mother and when she found that the broken limb did not knit had called in neighbors who carried mother to the depot and sent her to a hospital two hundred miles away. Father did not even accompany mother to the depot, saying that he had to look after the livestock; there were some sows that were about to farrow and he had to stay to see that the male hog did not devour the young. (Spiritually this was what my father did, and he was angry at mother because she tried to cheat him with

a bag of stones instead of giving him our souls to devour.)

The thought of my mother, who had given bones to so many of us, now lying with her brittle bones broken, never to be made whole, and our own bones so flabby that we could not stand upright, much less lend aid to support her—this crushed me. I was tied hand and foot and could only die a thousand agonies in my own soul while she lay dying in the body. My nerves were drenched in the acid of slow dissolution; there was no health in my body and only horror and hallucination in my mind. Yet I wrote letters to my mother urging her to be of good cheer and telling her to remember that her bones and flesh were German and would surely mend.

In such a state of mind I could not write the funny essays that I had produced before. Bitterness became the tone of them and the editor said he feared that my series had run its course. When a man's hope sinks, the very earth becomes quicksand and sucks him under.

Fortunately for me my office friend "Rube" Levy proved one of the most sympathetic of men. Although he was a cartoonist, a profession that called for grotesque pictures to titillate the vulgar mob, he had a poetically sensitive awareness of his fellowmen. He saw that my soul was sick and that I was drugging its agony with the opiate of self-sympathy or martyr-mania. He tried to cure me. He explained that my delusions would disappear if I would quit pitying myself.

"You are not abused, but very fortunate," he said, "in having broken into New York. This will be worth everything to you if you will bide your time. You are getting enough money to prevent starvation, so you are equipped

to stick it out—and win. Your task now is to consolidate your success and that will mean big money by and by. When K. I. K. came to New York he had a hard time finding any editor who would give him a chance at all. He wasn't asking for money, he was asking only for an opening in New York. He worked here several years before his pay got as high as you get now. For years the morning mail brought letters to the editor saying that K. I. K. was no good and that the paper would be more satisfactory without his foolish stuff. But K. I. K. worked on in the face of this discouragement and finally won. It was the same with me. I worked here several years without scoring any success. Then I chanced to draw a cartoon that pleased the readers. I pondered over it a week, trying to study out what element was in that cartoon which had not been in the others. I finally figured it out and keeping that same element in all my work I made a go of the cartooning game.

"Never look into your own moods and prejudices for inspiration," he went on. "Study the outside world with the calm detachment of a scientist. Once you know what reality is and what the people want, then you can give it to them—if you've got it—and get the reward. If you haven't got what they want, you will know it and quit trying to be a writer. You must regard the public as a bunch of fish and then find out what kind of bait they automatically rise to. I believe in you. I believe you have got something that the public likes. But lately you have quit writing to bait the public and begun baiting your own private grouch in the guise of writing humor. The editor is for you and I'm for you and Kenyon is for you,

although I think I understand what ails you better than Kenyon does. Stay with us and you'll make good."

But I didn't stay. I knew that Levy was right. Yet I was incurable by good advice. Nothing but money could cure me. I didn't need more money to keep going. I needed more money to prove to myself that I was not a failure. My father had said that I would never earn money, and now I believed it. He had pecked out the liver of my resolution and I was done for.

I made one more effort. By force of will I wrote my essays funnier than they had ever been. And after a week of this I went to the managing editor and demanded a raise of pay or my discharge. He sensed the challenging spirit of sulkiness in which I made this rude demand. But with the utmost gentleness he said: "If you will stay on at the present salary and let me gradually adjust it, I can promise you full justice. Remember, that the right spirit counts much in these relationships."

Everybody had told me the same thing. But in arguing against a mania, the persuasiveness of gods would be in vain.

I stayed only until I had accumulated $200 for my return to Arkansas. My wife knew I was doing the wrong thing, but she was too sweet to oppose it. Also she knew that I was a physical wreck again and that no healthy will could dwell in such a body. . . . In my secret heart I knew that I would have to conquer consumption before I could conquer that little, little world of parody letters which seemed then the whole universe of my ambition.

There was a young city editor on the *Letter* who had a fine physique and a healthy luster in his eye. He told

me that when he was twenty he was helpless with incipient tuberculosis. The doctor told him that athletics could cure his case. "But it can't cure you," the doctor added, "because you are a whipped and spiritless hound. You haven't got manhood enough to save yourself by going in for athletics. There's nothing to you." This made him an athlete. Nothing else would have done it, and the doctor knew it. "I resolved to show that doctor, or die in the effort, and if I saw I was dying I intended to kill him, too," the editor told me.

And I, too, felt that I would have to get well or kill some one.

XI

RETURNING to Arkansas by way of Kansas I visited the old farm home at Harrow, eager to look upon my mother's face again.

The sagging and decrepit farmhouse looked shoddier than ever, now that I had seen the splendors of a world metropolis. My mother hobbled on crutches to the front door when she saw me coming, tears of loneliness streaming down her weary face. My own eyes were so dim that I could not see the intervening screen and flung myself against that flimsy door. It knocked my glasses off and hurt me, and when my vision focused again I saw my father grinning maliciously as he said: "Don't be in such a damn hurry that you come right in through the side of the house. Don't they have doors in New York? Or has New York addled what little sense you ever had?" It was the Alden wit; I wanted to love him but he always stabbed me. Mother knew that I was wincing under his sneer, but as she pressed me to her she whispered in my ear that I must not mind what father said, it was just his way.

As I had never been greeted otherwise by him, I took it as a matter of course. I was eager to tell him all the interesting things I had seen—he had never been East of Chicago and I supposed he would be curious—but he would not listen.

"Tell it to your mother," he said, "sometime when I'm

out in the field. She likes to blab but it makes me nervous. Us farmers out here in Kansas don't care a damn about New York anyway. The further East you go the bigger damn fools the people are, and I see you've been clear to the end of the line."

I laughed and took this bludgeoning as my due; I never expected anything else. Not until I should have finally succeeded and become a money maker could I expect him to regard me as anything but a credulous, writing fool.

Mother told me that she was glad she had broken her leg for it had given her "a new lease on life." She had been ready to surrender and die, for she had spent thirty-five years on that farm, cooking and washing for a big family until they one by one were driven away, and then she had continued cooking and washing for the Bohemian hired hands that took the children's places. She had never been to a theater or concert in all those years and had never seen a motion picture. Father had frowned on her going to the neighbors' for an occasional visit. And when she had hitched up a plow horse to an old vehicle and started to a neighbor's two miles away she had been brought back in an automobile with her leg broken and father had said: "If you had stayed at home where you'd ought to have been it wouldn't have happened."

"Really, Roy," she said, "that month in a Kansas City hospital is the only pleasure I have had in the last twenty years. At first I thought the pain would drive me insane. The bone was broken in two places and it took a long time to begin to mend and for two weeks I could not sleep at all. But it was a change from the endless grind

in this kitchen; people were waiting on me, not I on them. And the doctor was so kind and a red-headed Irish girl was my nurse—and—well, it was a change—and I see now that I had to have a change or I couldn't have lasted much longer."

"Well, mother," I said, "it is a jolly life, this farm life in Kansas when a woman can have a great treat once in twenty years by going to the hospital to enjoy a broken leg."

XII

MY brother Wilbur, who was working in Nebraska, had a span of horses and a set of farming implements but no land. I had more land in Arkansas than I could use; I needed farm equipment and money to develop my land. So I told my brother, who had a wife and three children, that I would give him forty acres of raw land as an act of brotherly love and socialistic comradeship. I was always giving away things. Time and again I gave hogs, corn and money to needy "comrades," although I was miserably poor myself. It shows that I lacked good sense.

My desire to earn big money was to demonstrate to my father that I could earn a living and thus free myself from his scornful gaffing of my self-pride; and I desired to make the big money out of writing high-grade journalism to prove to K. I. K. that I was not a bush-leaguer.

My father's increasing greed for money was a cropping out of the miser phenomenon. He was afraid to move into educated circles where he must improve his rustic manners or be a second-rate figure, so he had retreated into inner nature and immured himself on the farm surrounded by a Bohunk yokelry and deluded himself with the idea that he was the biggest man in the neighborhood because he had the most money. A miser is one who by looking at his gold can purchase in fancy the goods and pleasures he desires and can consume them in fancy and be sated

and yet have the actual money still in hand. Father's money enabled him to purchase greatness, leadership of the herd. It was only a fanciful leadership, but to him the delusion was complete. He was the big, brave bull that led the whole flock, and he gored to death all the young bulls that tried to dispute his supremacy.

I have said the flesh is dual in function, therefore the mind is dual in reflecting the shadow of the flesh. My father's life was governed by the reproductive function of flesh. He was not a big enough bull to lead the herd, he was really cowardly in that function, hence in his dream life he became the big bull of the herd. That was the satisfaction he purchased with his hoarded gold. It also explains why his aim in life was to defeat and trample every one of his sons and why he was harsh and ruthless in his final attitude toward women.

The other half of the dual power of protoplasm governed my brother Wilbur's greed. His was the cry of flesh for food to replace itself, and only secondarily the cry of the organism to reproduce organisms.

It was the courage of the colon that had caused Wilbur once to continue eating beans when brother Johnnie told him to desist or be beaten to death. Had he been courting a female and been told to desist or be killed, he would not have pressed on and let the fighting begin.

Then in stepped I with the Jesus instinct, which is the feminine impulse to preserve the young and conserve the tribe at the cost of self-sacrifice. It is, therefore, not surprising that when my own defeats, disasters and insanity drove me into the dream life for easement from reality's anguish I became a messiah reconciled to my crucifixion.

I was returning to my cabin in Arkansas with a hundred dollars my wife and I had saved by denying ourselves the necessities of life. I could give Wilbur a piece of land but no capital to live on while he was developing it. I asked father to lend him $500 to enable him to remove his family and his belongings from Nebraska to the Ozark land and to maintain him until he could raise a crop. Father had plenty of money to lend to his Bohemian neighbors, and there was no perceptible reason why he should not lend some of it to his sons on similar security. But he would not.

At first he promised to lend the money to Wilbur, and as soon as Wilbur had quit his job as a rural mail carrier and was packing up to go to Arkansas, father announced that he would not lend the money after all. Instead he had a better plan. Let Wilbur and his family and I and my family come to his acres and all work for him. Thus he said, we would be sure of bread. Otherwise we would surely starve. His purpose was to balk us from developing our own land and to make us his underlings and unpaid servants; this was so plain to me that I felt indignant. I gave Wilbur my hundred dollars and he came to Arkansas.

Father hadn't got us yet, but he could wait. The two of us with our families were on the raw land without capital and he figured that we would soon come back to him whipped and meek. He wrote to us that Arkansas was not a real man's country. It was the refuge of runts, the catch-pot for inferior people, a place where the weaklings, failures and dregs of the American race could escape the competition of their betters. He was not so far wrong in

that. But he was wrong when he returned to the estimate of Kansas. He said that Kansas was the selected excellences of the nation. In truth he had gone to Kansas because the pioneer conditions there made it easy for him to escape the competition of his betters.

"Kansas," he wrote, "lies in the center of the nation in the world's richest valley, and it lies in the center of that valley. In Richland county the corn belt overlaps the wheat belt. The hog and cattle belt overlaps the corn and wheat belt. This, therefore, is the world's bread and meat center. Naturally the wisest people in the world see to it that they live in such a place. Old Richland county is that place and my farms lie in the center of Richland county." He had thereby proved that he was the wisest man in the world.

In boyhood I had been ready to believe that he was the greatest man. But now I knew he was a victim of self-kidding. I had been reading a German professor, a monograph on the self-importance of primitive tribes. He said that all low beings like the bushmen, the black fellows and the hottentots all taught that their country was the center of the world and that the desirable zones overlapped in their stamping grounds, and that the rest of the world was a catch-pot for lesser peoples and that these inferior peoples were degenerate offshoots from the prime central tribe. This formula so aptly fitted my father's concept that I smiled.

Brother Wilbur and I started farming in the wooded Ozark hills with high hopes while the spring was new. We were pinched for money, but I managed to earn enough by writing to meet our necessities. Of such things

as pork and honey, milk, vegetables, and other country produce we had an abundance. In fact, Wilbur ate entirely too much sweets and peach pies and shortcake so that he had a stomachache for months. I urged him to fast for a couple of days and cure himself, but he couldn't resist the food three times a day.

Once when we were hunting squirrels we shot one that tumbled into the crotch of the tree and stayed there. It was about thirty feet to the crotch and the tree was so large that one could not span it. Brother Wilbur started to climb it; but he tried to span it with his arms. He was forced to hug the tree so closely that it interfered with his efforts to climb, yet he was afraid to release the tree from his embrace and merely take hold of the ridges of the protruding bark. Half way up the tree he surrendered in exhaustion and slid down. I was not a muscular man like Wilbur and years of sedentary work had caused my physical vigor to evaporate. I resolved to climb that tree or die; I would use will power to supply my lack of muscle. To the amazement of my brother I climbed the big tree, clinging to the rough bark with my fingers, and got the squirrel. But it was the longest and severest effort of will that I had yet endured. When half way up the tree I was exhausted. But I would not quit. I had seen the big-muscled Wilbur weaken and surrender and I was disgusted with him. I went on and on, fighting off collapse by desperate concentration of mind, now up so high that when collapse should come I must fall to my death. With my last vestige of strength I gained the crotch and dragged my body into the resting place, half-conscious.

All men want meat, but many of them lack the courage to go on when the going is hard and get it. It is the stomach-minded man that usually lacks the courage of his stomach convictions.

Brother Wilbur read the *Cry of Realism* and believed its gospel. One of the plans it advocated was for the Government to cease using the Navy for war and destruction but to use it for constructive, self-supporting purposes, such as going out and killing the fat whales in the Northern seas and distributing whale meat at a penny a pound to the hungry citizens of this downtrodden republic. It was one way to throttle the devilish High Cost of Living; but Wall Street, which thrived by the impoverishment of man, would not consent to letting the cheap whale meat come in. Another plan for free meat was to drive the Government reindeer southward from Alaska in the fall and stab them at the doorways of the citizens in midwinter when the venison would have natural refrigeration, thus giving free meat to the people. It was argued that the Arctic mosses around the North Pole would fatten enough reindeer to feed the world and that the Government already owned vast herds of reindeer and that they could be driven southward to the relief of the American proletariat, save that Wall Street barred the way. Wall Street had invested money in the packing business and therefore bribed the lawmakers to keep free venison from the starving householder.

For twenty years I have seen these promises of reindeer meat and Northern whale steak going the rounds of the press and I have never heard anybody openly laugh at it. The belief in these gifts of meat to the incompetent is but

the cruder aspect of the cry for Federal Aid. The American believes he cannot make a living and he demands that the Government support him. The workingman demands that the Government aid him by reducing his Cost of Living (pay part of his bread-and-meat bill) and the farmer who raises bread and meat demands that the Government inflate the price of this bread he sells and also furnish him money to carry on his business. He does not want whale meat and reindeer steak, as the city man does, but demands cash instead, and to get this cash suggests that the Government sell the Army and Navy for junk and distribute the money among the farmers as "relief."

This stomach-cry of the Puritans for Federal Aid in all its hundred forms I designate under the general term of the "cry for whale meat." The belief that there is a paternal fairy, a Governmental Santa Claus who from a magic source can give America unearned sweet meats because they are good children (Nordics) is a trait of the infantile man.

My brother Wilbur was a socialist because of the cry of his viscera for free food and plenty of it. My father was a socialist because of the cry of his masculinity to be the leading bull of the herd; and he believed that the social revolution would gore to death the bigger bulls of Wall Street. I was a socialist because of my feministic cry for universal brotherhood and an end of blood destruction among the tribe.

I would have continued farming in Arkansas and financing Wilbur and his family until they were self-sustaining had he made it possible for me to do so. But the stomach-courage in him was making him revolt against my tyranny.

It was necessary for us to keep our expenditures low, for my income was low. He wanted to be fed luxuriously without waiting until he could earn the luxuries. We had an abundance of all the necessary foods, for the land was prolific.

He was continually making covert references to "starving to death." I supposed he was forecasting a future possibility and I assured him that in future years we would have ever more and more. But it seems his complaint was against the ample fare we then had. He wanted ice cream and chocolate candy.

When father definitely refused to lend us money to increase our farming equipment, Wilbur lost heart. He was one of those fellows who before they reach their goal always lose heart.

He announced: "I haven't got enough fat on my guts to stand this hard work." How truly he expressed his philosophy in terms of a yearning intestine.

When my mountaineer neighbors told me that Wilbur was coming to them and complaining that I oppressed him, that I had brought him to Arkansas to exploit him and that I was a little tin Wall Street trying to ride him as the real Wall Street rode the big farmers, I was disgusted. The mountaineers were a hardy people who had no unsated yearnings. Little they asked of life, and that little they had the hardihood to go out and get by their own efforts. They would laugh at Wilbur's whining and they told me: "I knowed as soon as I saw that feller that he'd never make a go of it in Arkensaw."

Wilbur's sullen mood had dampened my spirit. For a month there had not been a laugh heard on our farm.

One cannot long endure another man's grouch. In a burst of protest I told him to laugh or leave. He departed in the night and went back to his socialist aunt in Kansas. He had instructed his little boy to tell me that he had "had enough." I had had sufficient also. His family was left on my hands, and it required all the money I possessed to furnish them transportation to the place where he had gone. I then sold my cow and pigs and accumulated two hundred dollars in cash, and bidding my wife and child good-by I again struck out for New York.

XIII

A BOOM for columnists had developed in the metropolis. Kenneth I. Kenyon, whose rhymes and paragraphs in the Evening *Letter* had been steadily attracting more notice over a period of some eight or nine years, had been offered a place on the *Leader* at double his former salary.

The *Letter* was canvassing the available poets and paragraphers for a successor to K. I. K. The managing editor, T. E. Jones, suggested to me that perhaps I could fill the place. My heart swelled up with a sudden hope. Years before I had dreamed of doing a column in New York, but that ambition had languished and disappeared as my relish for farming had increased and crystallized in the aim of having a little corn field in the Southern hills. But my father's perpetual glooming and groaning on his Kansas acres and my brother's stomachache in the Arkansas woods had now killed my relish for the soil as my grandmother's misconduct in York State had wilted grandfather's joy of his fields. Gradually the plowed furrows had become accursed and I can never look upon it with the old rapture.

There were a hundred applicants for the column on the *Letter*, but the editor told me to go in training for the job. There was a month yet before the close of the year and he told me: "You will be safe in spending this time in blowing out your Pan pipes and getting ready to sound

a clear woodsy note when you take charge the first of the year."

But when the last day of December came he told me that there would be no job for me, as he had signed a contract with the retiring editor of The Society Set magazine.

Another paralyzing blow to me.

My money was gone; my wife and baby were a thousand miles away in the woods; my heart was smitten with a sense of hopelessness.

I had just received a letter from my youngest brother, Arthur, the last boy of the six to remain with father on the farm. This boy had never been allowed to go to school except for a few brief winter months, as father said he was going to mold at least one son to his heart's desire. "Education has made fools of all the other boys," father had said. "I'm going to save this one by keeping him away from school and colleges and bringing him up on the farm to have horse sense." He intimated that Arthur would be under the tutelage of the smartest man in Kansas, an advantage he could get at no university.

Arthur's letter was misspelled and ungrammatic, phrased in the lingo of the Bohemian farm hands, but through it shone a light of love and sympathy. It had been addressed to me in Arkansas and forwarded to New York. He said that father had gone about the farm a whole day laughing and shouting. Brother Wilbur had informed him that I was now penniless and starving in Arkansas, and father had begun dancing and singing: "Roy is down and out! Roy is down and out!" It was his delicious hour of victory, and like an Indian he had

made a song of triumph and spent the day in dancing.

Arthur wrote me that he had three dollars and seventy-five cents, and that if I needed it he would be glad to send it to me. But it was not in Arkansas that I was down and out. My wife and baby were there, while I was penniless and beaten in New York.

It was New Year's Eve and in a drunkenness of mental agony I walked along the lighted streets and saw the happy folks carousing in every inn. The irony of it struck in on me and I laughed. I was full of venom, and like a crazed serpent I enjoyed fanging myself.

"I hate the world," I said. "It is a world of swine. And every time one of the squealing swine gets it in the neck I like to see it, even if the squealing son of a —— is me!"

I reviewed my past from the vantage of that stunning hour. Luck was always against me. I remembered how as a child I had been defeated by the baby in my efforts to undress him. "I can never make a living," I had cried. A follower of Bryan, I was destined always to lick the empty pickle barrel of defeat. And I had moved to Missouri—"They'll never carry Missouri"—but that year Roosevelt broke the Solid South and I lost the money I had bet with an Elk—and the Elk had received an early tip election night and robbed me on a sure thing. I had aimed at Paris and art and had landed in Arkansas where my neighbors could not read and write. "He doesn't know enough to pound sand in a rat hole," my father's voice echoed in my ears—"Roy is down and out at last, hurrah!" I had staggered out of the University round-shouldered and tubercular and when I announced that I

was going to marry, the doctor told me it would mean my early death. But I had gone on and fought back the wasting plague and had struggled upward in my profession, but the luck could never break right for me. I was born never to win—to fall within a grasp of the goal, my hand reaching for the crown, but never to wear it. Prophetic had been my childish cry: "I know I'll never be able to make a living!" And now I was a man of thirty, brave enough in my fighting, tireless in my effort, but handicapped by the fate that I was destined never to make a living. And the baby that had first revealed that fate for me, now reached his unlettered hand across the hostile clods of Kansas saying, "Here is all I have—three dollars and seventy-five cents. I want you to take it."

This was my New Year's Eve in New York while the wine bubbled and the city laughed. And in the Arkansas cabin my wife sat by her wood fire and told her little daughter: "Daddy will soon send money for us to come to him. He has got a fine job in New York."

And in the farmhouse in Kansas my father and mother and the boy that was kept at home sat round their stinking cob fire (for though father was rich he would not buy fuel but burned the cobs picked from the muck in the pig sty) and father boasted of his canniness.

"The boys that left home now have no home and are hungry," he said, and the crippled mother took up her crutch and hobbled to her cold bedroom to lie and weep, and the boy who had no schooling fondled the three dollars and seventy-five cents in his pocket and gazed at the master of that miserable house and did his own sympathetic thinking.

XIV

I FINALLY got the column job after all. The Society Set man had differed with the editor of the *Letter* on the "policy" of his column. He wished to make it sarcastic and snobbish and when the editor asked him to strike a more popular note he resigned and I was given the place. There was much sympathy for the man who had been cashiered, but I did not sympathize. I had had so much hard luck with myself that I had become too tough-minded to sympathize with anybody and like a good Nietzschean I had written sympathy off the books. I no longer ask for sympathy. I do not want it and I will never get it. Up to that time I had been fond of it, but life had twisted my tail so hard that I had jumped forward and was thereby one step nearer the goal of manhood.

And now I had won all that I had wanted; I was a well paid journalist in New York.

But the sudden upturn in my fortunes was too much for me. I walked on air and gradually grew drunken on egotism. Intoxication is what every man wants and I had it. The philosopher finds it momentarily in alcohol, the emotionalist seeks it in music, the self-kidder gets it in day-dreaming of his own grandeur, and the religionist awaits it in heaven.

But I had drunk the actual cup of success, there was no illusion about it; it was real. I was doing a column in

New York and getting good money for it. It came just at the right time, when youth was still in my veins and sap in my intellect so that I was green enough to enjoy it to the utmost bounds of human ecstasy.

Now that I had no legend of defeat to lean on, I staggered in my mind and had to seek some new support to steady me. While groping for a new philosophy I hit upon a theory of sublimation. I was now an intellectual god. Through spiritual crucifixion I had risen superior to all the hopes and passions of this world. Although I had finally won what I had hoped for, I now saw that it makes no difference whether we win or lose—the real triumph is to cease pitying ourselves—to cease to care. The destiny of man is to be utterly defeated and having drunk the last dregs of mental anguish, to rise transfigured with a spirit that neither hopes, rejoices nor despairs.

I had now completed my symbol of the son of God; out of my own tribal diaphragm I had developed the Christian legend. I had been Christ in the metropolis humiliated and hanged, and lo, now I was Christ transfigured and triumphant, an eternal dweller in the New Jerusalem.

I recount these mental states of mine because I am a type. In telling on myself I am telling on everybody. I say that our religions, our "high ideals," and our "progressivism" and which we would force upon the nation are all so many sweet hallucinations cast before our eyes by the tribal vitascope within our diaphragms. Squirt another ounce of brains into a man and he would realize that what he sees upon the screen and calls Truth—are motion pictures . . . shadows of a soul on fire.

BOOK FOUR

I

BROTHER TOM . . . the gnome . . . poet-prodigy: the well-beloved . . . what of him . . . he who was my hope for our family . . . a redeemer of the Bradleys out of poesy . . . or in a Utopia?

One day before Tom was married he hopped a freight and went to the Mexican border to free the peons. He took with him an old uniform which he had worn in the state militia and a rusty bayonet that had descended in father's line from Bunker Hill. He had come like a Christ to lift up the lowly. But when he saw the swarming, vermin-ridden half-breeds, he was Napoleon.

"I can get rich in this country," he wrote his girl. "The time of brotherhood is yet far off. Meantime I will get on these people's backs and ride them."

But they stole his baggage and in the later raids of Villa no doubt some *hombre* marched in the Yankee uniform and waved the sword of Bunker Hill. Down there at the border Tom was taken for a *hombre* himself and he watched a Yankee money-changer in the act of short-changing an old lady while changing her $200 Mexican gold into American currency.

"Give that money back and do it quick!" shouted Tom Bradley, the avenging knight.

As the World War developed the preliminary whispers of pacifism blew upon Tom's heart till it glowed red hot

with brotherly love. He became a towering Prince of Peace. To his wife it seemed a contradiction that Tom was both a pacifist and military fanatic. But she dwelt in reality and did not know that in wonderland there is no logic and that contradictories are plausible. That they are *God* is what all drunken egos dream: and the god-man has two types, Napoleon and Christ. The Nordic race thinks itself Napoleon when it nails others to the cross, and Christ when it gets nailed itself.

Tom and I had become estranged and for years he seemed as one dead to me. . . . I felt him lost in the labyrinth of hallucination. He was fighting gallantly the imaginary minotaur and for a time he considered that I was that monster. Wall Street was his socialist-soul's Big, Big Bogey, and he got it into his head that I was bought by Wall Street because I was writing for a capitalist newspaper. . . . And I had to realize that my childhood's beloved and redeemer was like all other Bradleys, a wanderer in nightmares in waking hours.

Limeless children do not have good teeth. Brother Tom's teeth at twenty-five had fallen out, all save four in front which held his pipe. His children numbered two, and his wife had kept the pot boiling by raising chickens and truck to eke out the occasional wages Tom would earn. Also occasionally he sold a fragment of fantastic poetry to a newspaper.

His wife's parents in Nebraska kept the babies clothed and his socialist aunt sent him gifts of money.

After ten years in the Oklahoma cabin where Tom had written volumes of bizarre and beautiful imaginings but had never earned a living, the patience of his wife wore

out and she laid down her ultimatum: "Either give up your writings or give up me." This shocked and dazed him. He loved his wife and babies. He had never thought of himself as a mere father and husband in a real world where he ought to earn a living for them. Her parents had told her to come back and serve in their kitchen if she couldn't make her husband go to work.

She decided to give him one more chance. Since all he could do was write, he could go back with her and start a weekly paper in the village of Cracken, Nebraska, where her parents were living. Cracken is a farmer's town of five hundred, surrounded by corn fields. The people are mostly Germans and Scandinavians with here and there a surviving Yankee clinging to the job of postmaster, druggist, or local agent for hail and tornado insurance.

Tom's weekly paper pleased the farmers. He was gifted as an editor, and his poetic fancy, toying with such topics as corn cobs, threshing bees, manure spreaders, and country school ma'ams, molded the local legend like a gilded tale.

"For the first time in my life I am making a living," he said with artless pleasure. "I am supporting my family." The wonder of it was like the beauty of autumn golden rod upon the hills.

II

WHEN the War finally came to Nebraska, even to the village of Cracken where the country editor, who once slew a rooster with a sword, was still a gnome of nothing, our Tom wrote a vitriolic editorial in condemnation of all war and this war in particular. The Christ phase of his ego—his pacifism and internationalism—spoke as in a frenzy. Having mailed out the papers, Tom took the next train to Lincoln where candidates for the officers' school were being examined.

Arrived at Lincoln, Tom did not stop at a hotel but went at once to the University campus where physical examinations were taking place in the armory. He had been there before when he was a boy and John Pershing was commandant of the cadets. Tom, as a militiaman, had participated in maneuvers under Pershing.

When he arrived at the armory he saw a number of big husky farm boys, Danes, Swedes and Germans, who had had their two years of drill when they were in college. While waiting for his turn, Tom watched these fellows going through the physical tests. Tom had taken off his thick-lensed glasses and had put them in his pocket so that his weak eyesight might not be betrayed in advance.

When his turn came, Tom stepped forward haltingly. The officer said abruptly:

"Read what it says on that sign."

"What sign?"

No sooner were the words out than Tom realized that he had blundered hopelessly. Unable to see the sign at all, he might at least have used a little Dutch cunning, stared into vacancy and said: "I can't make out the third letter, sir." But the examiner was indulgent, and did not give him a hard run; in fact he waived the question of eyesight and asked Tom if he had any teeth troubles.

"No," said Tom. "I have been rid of my damned teeth for years. They used to keep me up all night with toothache, but they don't trouble me any more."

The surgeon pressed two fingers against Tom's forelip and then looked at the depression.

"Horribly anæmic," he said. "Take a dose of epsom salts every other morning without fail and eat lots of green stuff such as lettuce and cabbage. If people would learn to do this it would save thousands of lives."

The surgeon then wrote Tom's full name on a card, filled out several blank lines on the card and told him to take it to Major Naismith in the main hall of the University.

Tom walked across the campus in a dizzy dream. He was an officer in the American Army! At last he was to breast the foeman's blazing ramparts leading his shouting men to victory or death. But what branch of the service would he be in? Would they assign him to command a company, or would they put him at the head of a regiment? He knew they would not yet regard him fitted to command an army corps. But how easily he had passed the examinations. His fame and his character had counted much; so striking was his personality that they had made his physical examination a perfunctory gesture. They

had not asked him to strip like other candidates who were rigidly compelled to meet the test on all requirements.

He handed his card to Major Naismith. The major filled out another card which he presented deferentially to Tom. . . . His commission!

Through the clouds in which his head was sailing, Tom looked dizzily down at that priceless piece of paper to see whether he was a colonel or a general. Something went wrong with the mechanism of seeing; he couldn't read. He took his glasses out of his pocket. The blurred words finally reached his mind like glimmers of heat lightning. . . . Excused from military service. . . . Physical disability. . . . "With the thanks of the Republic," the Major had written.

Tom stood gasping in a stunned agony.

"What?" he said. "You don't want me?"

"Son," said the Major rising and patting the trembling man on the back, "you are a good scout to offer yourself. But don't you realize that physically you don't amount to anything? You are toothless and half blind, you are a little shrimp of a fellow with a head two sizes too large. You couldn't command men; there isn't a doughboy in America that wouldn't give you the laugh on sight."

The next thing Tom knew he was out on the prairie east of Lincoln approaching the insane asylum. He was there without purpose, for he had been walking in a stunned condition. It was the fall of a god, it was the awakening of a drunken man to reality. In the agony of the great light he could only walk and walk. There was no world for him to live in, his world had burst.

Tom thought of his wife and kids; he would never see them again and it was the loss of these . . . yes, he felt the loss of them the most in thus losing his whole world. For he could not go back and face the scorn of the woman who had married him thinking he was a tall guardsman. Now that the spell had ended she would see that he was only an ugly dwarf. His children would not recognize the stranger. His country at war was gathering every resource, but he was no resource at all. He was so insignificant that they could not use him in any capacity. And his children would be frightened to see this odd figure crawling back, a shrunken deformity of the man they had called father. The woe of Hamlet, the tragedy of Lear were but a pin prick to this Injun dance of torture that flayed a soul alive and left it running naked in its agony.

At the wall of the insane asylum he turned back and walked again toward the city. He had been an hour in the world of reality and was beginning to find his way about. After all he was no less than he had always been; he need not fear his wife. . . . She had always known that he was nothing. His opium dream had never set her seeing double. She had married him in his homeliness and poverty, and had starved with him ten years when her children were clothed by charity. His children, his neighbors, all who knew him would see him to-day with the same eye that had assessed him yesterday. Why, he was just a dub, one of a million dubs. He could sue and be sued, pay poll tax and vote, eat, smoke, cough or sneeze, and move about claiming his rights at taverns, depots and on all common carriers as long as he tendered legal money

in payment thereof. The problem of exile was ended; he boarded a train for home.

As he approached Cracken he saw the two elevators, the rusty red depot, the stockyards and the huddled houses under tanks and windmills like herbage at the watering trough in a dusty field.

"The lowest round on the ladder of civilization," Tom said to himself. "And I have a slippery tail-holt even here."

He thought of Chicago and New York and beyond them the other capitals of the world . . . Rome, which he had expected to enter at the head of the Republican army. . . . Looking on Cracken with his new eyes he saw himself returning not as a romantic giant but as a wall-eyed runt come home to Castle Pig-Sty-on-the-Plain. When he stepped down from the day coach he noticed a commotion on the depot platform. The village boys were pulling the whiskers of a Dunkard farmer who had bought no Liberty bonds.

Again Tom was a tall, terrible captain.

"Stand back!" he roared.

The mob halted. Tom pushed the escaping Dunkard on the train. Again the mob started.

"Stand back!"

"Who says so?"

"*I do!*"

They saw that it was only Tom.

"It's the pacifist editor," some one jeered. Another cried: "Get him, buddies. Kill him!" The Bohemian that swung a fist at Tom's big head missed it by a mile. Tom was going around the rear end of the train. The

pack was after him and when their feet were on the gravel they began gaining.

As Tom neared the corner of the stockyard, he laid back his heavy head and digging his intelligent heel into the ground he turned at the very sharpest angle that his momentum would allow. The big Bohemian had not made any calculations and on the detour he tried for the same angle that Tom had made. His foot slipped and he went sprawling. The fox had turned his trick, the dull hound had skidded into the ditch, and now he let out his 100-yard speed and disappeared through the lumberyard, across the draw in Billings' back yard and over the hedge fence into his own kitchen door.

His wife was taking up fried chicken and the table was laid for four.

"You expected me back?" asked Tom. "How did you know they wouldn't take me for a soldier?"

His wife looked at him with a patronizing smile and turned back to dishing up the supper. In that gesture he read her intimate confession. It was all over quickly and without any moaning or agonizing. She had always known him for what he was and she had been kind. There was still a place laid for him at his own table.

"Have you plenty of cabbage?" he asked. "I am going to eat some myself."

"Well, what's got through you, Tom Bradley, that you've took a notion to eat cabbage?"

"They told me," he said boldly, "as my first step toward whipping the Germans to go home and eat some sauerkraut. It took the whole United States army to

convince me of a fact that you have always known. But they've just told me that I am the biggest fool that America has ever produced." Then he laughed with an unearthly laughter, while tears rolled down his cheeks.

III

IN the midsummer vacation season I returned to Kansas to visit the old house. This was the homecoming that I had long dreamed of. I had risen to high rank in my profession and had made a success in the metropolis. Hundreds of friends in New York were applauding me and I was making all the money I really needed. My poems had appeared in many of the magazines and I had been a minor speaker at a dinner at the Lotos Club, the club that Mark Twain had belonged to! It was true that many persons wrote me letters, unsigned, telling me that I had made no impression on the intelligent class in the city and that I was a ham and a yokel who could never approach the writing of real literature.

There was but one fly speck on the cup from which I drank this utter joy. I was receiving only seventy-five dollars a week and I had set one hundred a week as the figure that would convince me that I was a successful man. I was proving satisfactory to my employers and it was only a question of time before the emolument should reach the sacred figure. In fact my contract specified that the *Letter* retained the option of renewing it at that figure. And so I went home to receive at last my father's blessing.

I am an ass and have always been one. I was more a feeler than a thinker. Especially was I dominated by my feelings when it came to family relationship for I dearly

loved my brothers and sister, my mother and my father —and especially my father who had been my hero.

And so I returned to my father's house, not as the prodigal son in rags come to eat husks with the swine but as the "Harrow boy who made good" with my New York prosperity glittering in my raiment . . . .

Father was out in one of his corncribs which was heaped high with great yellow ears. I found him sitting on top of the corn throwing it farther back under the roof, for it was heaped at too high an angle near the edge. I climbed up beside him and as I talked I helped him in this easy labor.

"Well, father," I said, "I have made money as a writer after all. You were afraid I could not succeed at it and that I would starve to death. But I am earning seventy-five dollars a week and I am established in New York where the fastest competition is found."

"Seventy-five dollars a week isn't much," he sneered. "I make more than that myself."

Then something struck me a blow in the mouth. The hired man and my young brother Arthur had come that way, and finding some scattered ears of corn on the ground had begun throwing them up into the crib where we were. The first ear had hit me in the mouth, smashing my lips till they bled, and shocking me with the tense pain of an unexpected blow.

My father flung himself back like a coyote baying the moon and he laughed and shrieked with such gusts of mirth as told how well he enjoyed the sight of blood on my face and the sound of my crestfallen cry. I would have been dumb blind indeed not to perceive that in my

laughing father I faced the most unreasoning and relentless antagonist I should ever encounter in this world.

I returned to New York with the joy of my success all taken out of me.

IV

A SERIES of funny incidents had happened on my trip westward from New York. The war was merrily proceeding in Europe. Few old stock Americans knew exactly where they stood. We had all been taught to admire Germany and to like Germans for neighbors. The reason we liked the Germans is because we believed them to be our wooden-headed inferiors. But Paris was the city of every Puritan's desire, and France had saved this country in the dark days of the Revolution. And England was our mother country. It was a new form of the "love triangle," for the American didn't know whether he was on three sides of that triangle or on only one, and if on one—which one was he on?

While I was riding out of the Pennsylvania station, a girl in the Pullman asked me which side of the war Italy would enter on. I replied that Italy would soon be on the side of England.

Whereupon an enormous gentleman, the girl's father, rushed up and began beating me over the head with an umbrella and crying: "How much do you know? How much do you know? You don't know anything. You know absolutely nothing."

His hitting me on the head with a harmless umbrella did not bring about my collapse. What knocked me out was the declaration that I didn't know anything. That canker had been eating on me all my life, and on my

ancestors before me. They call it an inferiority complex and like a cancer it was devouring my character as it had destroyed my father's.

In the course of a few hours I learned that the gentleman who had assaulted me was a rich Indianapolis merchant of German descent. His *furor Teutonicus* had been aroused by my mere retailing of the fact that England had a semi-secret alliance with the Italians. But his suggestion that I didn't know anything had aroused the Puritan madness, the fear that one is not an intellectual leader —the dominant passion of our race. I sat cringing in the Pullman seat saying to myself, "Germany has provoked the nations of Europe, but now she's got me to fight, too! Germany has trouble on her hands this time for sure."

And that is how I declared war on Germany. There could be no compromising of the issue. Germany had said I didn't have any sense. She had aligned herself with K. I. Kenyon and my father, and from now on it must be war to the death.

I changed cars in Chicago, and while I was being shaved the barber said with a slight Teutonic accent:

"Germany will conquer the world. There will be no more crops raised anywhere until they surrender to Germany. America will have no crops. Because Germany controls the potash without which no crop can grow.

"There will be but one nation in all Europe, the German Empire. In South Africa a great German nation will rise up centering round the Boers.

"In Argentina another great German nation will arise and occupy South America. And in North America the United States is already German. Is it not so?"

And he held the razor blade poised across my jugular vein.

"Is it not so?"

I would be a rash man to deny it. So I said, "Yes!" And added, "You're darn tootin'."

It was an American slang of the 1890's, meaning you are eminently correct. And it pleased the German barber. He did not know that I was a masked American and had really called him a darn Teuton—a Hun.

I knew that the Germans were kidding themselves about being able to starve the Americans into such sudden subjection.

At Harrow I had found my father violently pro-German and this added to my sense of isolation. The whole world was unanimously for the Germans. The reason is simple. Every sorehead thought the Germans would fight his Freudian battles for him.

I talked with negro porters and found them pro-German. "You white folks need a good whuppin' an' de Germans gwyne give it to you."

My father believed the Germans would eventually land on the Eastern coast and give Wall Street a good whipping. He was willing for them to come as far west as Kansas City and whip the packing trust, which wasn't paying him a high enough price for hogs. He also expected them to turn the railroads on their backs and spank them for charging farmers "high rates" on their grain.

I visited my farm in Arkansas and it seemed to me most of the Arkansawyers were pro-German. England was in the war and England had once affronted Andy Jackson and the Arkansas Democrats at New Orleans. The Ar-

kansawyers were still fighting the battle of New Orleans and depending on Germany to give the English the "good whuppin' " that they so eminently deserved.

I began to believe that I was the only man in America that opposed the Germans, and this sense of isolation rather terrified me.

My Arkansas neighbors had bridled with wrath when I suggested that the Germans might not be all right. Every barber and porter was for them, and if one ever mentioned the Allied nations strangers would rush up and assault one with umbrellas. As I rode back to New York I was a subdued American indeed. I had got on the wrong side of the war and everybody was against me, father, mother, sister, brothers, old chums and neighbors —everybody was against me. The train was taking me back to my wife. Was she a German sympathizer, too? Dared I come home to her with my prejudices, or would such sentiments cause her to throw me out of my own house? I did some fast thinking. I thought of getting off the train and fleeing to Canada. But it was better timidly to spy out the lay of my hearth and home before taking it for granted that it was enemy soil. . . . So, in trepidation I crept home and was overjoyed to find that my wife was of English blood. . . .

v

THEN the Harvard culture, militant, began hitting me over the head with its umbrella. Insulting letters came from the Harvard camp calling me an upstart ignoramus and saying that I would "never do." They believed that their Latin was as vital as the Germans' potash and without this Harvard Latin no other tribe could raise a crop of humor.

They defined humor as the apt use of Latin phrase in parody and pun and the translation of Latin verse into modern slang. This was the only form of high-class humor, all else was vulgar clowning which anybody could do.

I was not an enemy of the Harvard culture. I held it as one holds all other tribal propagandas,—merely a bold hallucination that will blow up when it runs against the snag of facts. I had heard this Harvard propaganda from my Alden grandmother and my aunt Annabelle all my life and I knew it had no validity. They were an unwitty and unhumorous tribe. The essence of humor is to laugh at one's self. The Harvard Puritans could not laugh at themselves nor endure being laughed at. Mark Twain had once tried to kid the Boston Brahmins, and those sober jackasses had never forgiven him.

The Harvard cult pronounced their definition of humor and named K. I. K. as the greatest living exponent of it. K. I. K. encouraged his "following." He wanted to be

admired and loved. The fear that he was not the best mind in the herd made him a perfectionist. He was not solicitous for the rise of any strong young bulls who could horn him out of his leadership. He was always encouraging the young bulls as long as they looked to him as master; in this he was like my father. And, like my father, he smiled when the young bulls, striking for leadership, came a cropper.

I did not try to hector and bulldoze the Harvard followers. But they were mean and militant. They mailed me written jibes and they also called me on the telephone and pretending to be my friends asked me trick questions expecting that I would answer with self-glorifying lies. But I was not that kind of boob. Indeed the young men engaged in this activity were themselves fatuous dolts.

"You assume in your fat-headed complacency," one wrote, "that you have arrived. Because you have seduced a few well-known literary men to drink with you by paying for the drinks yourself, you assume, in your provincial and abysmal ignorance, that these men are meeting you on a plane of equality. But they are laughing at your vulgar pretensions. You have not arrived and you never will because the world of belles lettres is hopelessly beyond the comprehension of your boorish mind."

This letter was one of a series by the same writer. He demanded that I "cease aping an illustrious predecessor." This was the peremptory order made by a man who did not sign his name.

The "aping an illustrious predecessor" was a reference to my series of autobiographical notes, little happenings of my daily life in New York told to form a fable with

a moral tacked on the end (the Aldens are teachers) and they were by no means an imitation of Kenyon's "Diary of a Modern Climber," which itself was certainly an imitation of an "illustrious predecessor."

At dinners and poker parties I would come in contact with the Kenyon fans and they would smile pityingly at me and say, "But really after all, you know, there can be only *one* column in New York."

And they were so sweet about it that I could have kissed them.

I admired Kenyon's column and enjoyed it. But I knew why I enjoyed it. His art is the art of parody and he was brilliant at it. Aside from his paraphrase and parody his opinions on life were piffle like my own. He was a socialist like myself, and a socialist is a tribal intellect with a vast talent for self-deception.

Kenyon made use of three main principles of mob psychology in his drive to put his "Column" over the top. First was the use of magic syllables chanted until they fixed the attention of the literate mob. Second, having the attention of his class of initiates, he began giving them the secret signs, symbols and pass words of the order. This fraternal order was called Kenyon Contribs. The third tribal trait that he played on was the cry of the inferior man for sham greatness. The contributor assumed the names of great Roman personages of the Augustan age.

The nature of the American is such that he is a "jiner." Any great Shamming Society gets him. He came to America because he hated "artificial distinctions" and the "trappings of nobility." The reason he hated kings,

nobles and "distinguished" men was because he wanted to be such but lacked art and courage. Hence he denounced them and reverted to infantile dreaming. The founding of Massachusetts was a retreat, an infantile reversion. Hence the American gratifies his longing to be a noble, a paladin, a potentate, by joining a Self-kidding Society in which the "sterling democrats" call themselves nobles, rajahs and big oompahpahs and parade the streets in their false grandeur.

The contributors, calling themselves Dido, Cleopatra, Charlemagne, Cæsar and Alexander, were given a ritual of mysticism in which the mysteries were simple enough for any tribal ass to penetrate. Such signs as "c 2 k" were used instead of "curious to know" and when the candidate had penetrated these mysteries he felt that he was superior to other democrats.

Kenyon affected an involved, obscure and insincere verbosity, and his initiates learned this bastard style and wrote their own effusions in it as nearly as they could. The Master Mind, however, kept changing his abracadabra and always kept two phases ahead of his monkeylike imitators. He called the column such names as "the plinth of preciosity" and this "pillar of putrescence." The accepted candidates for Kenyon's mystic order were rewarded by being admitted to the Contribs Dinner, an annual druid festival at which the priests of the Mystic Column unveiled and discarded their assumed names and met one another face to face.

My own inborn quackery was more that of the demagogue than the organizer of mystic priesthoods. Bryan attracted the attention of the Western clodhoppers by

declaring "the humblest farmer in all this land is as much a business man as the greatest merchant in New York and is as much a financier as the man who in a back room in Wall Street corners the money of the world!"

The farmers believe the most fulsome and sickening flattery because they are dreamers and not realists. So in the Bryan manner I was a columnist demagogue (I was a sincere one), exalting the virtues of the illiterate, heaven-kissed roughneck, and so I had a numerous following and prospered well.

VI

I DO not wish to say that I was not caught in the herd currents of my own kind. Suddenly I was floating and fighting on a seething sea of tribal mania, my frantic spirit sucked down and vomited up in strange tides and undertows. The troubled waters of spiritual chaos of which I was tossed and engulfed in trying to walk upon those waters was the messianic delusion. I was a candle light moving upon the bosom of the floods. I was a flaming spirit hot with revelation. I was the new Christ with a message to replace the old, dead dispensation. I was the interpreter who could translate the real meanings of America so that all Americans could read. And so I wanted to write my great American novel. To whomever would listen I could talk about it by the hour. I needed neither food nor drink. The thought of that holy writing was both nourishment and intoxication. To my bored listeners I talked about that coming book in the same words that all fools have talked about the same book since the great race of paranoiac apes first learned to hieroglyph a record of their sweet delusions.

The breaking out of the war annoyed me. Especially when my editor told me to make no reference to the war or any of the warring nations in my column. Every paragraph we printed about the European belligerents brought a lot of warlike letters to the editor. He there-

fore conceived a protective idea, which idea was to keep his editorial page unaware that a war was going on. It killed my interest in columning; a man could think of nothing but the war and if I were not to write my thoughts in my column then I was through with the column. I had seen Captain Dents fight an imaginary war, but I never saw men ignore a real war. All the more reason why I must quit the paper and write my novel.

Later the ban was partly lifted and I was permitted, under protest, to make reference to the war. I strove without result to revive my interest in newspaper writing and my old zest for columning. The year was closing and I felt glad that soon I would be free; my contract was expiring and they could not hire me again except they should offer me a hundred dollars a week. That hundred dollars a week had been my former goal. And still I wanted it, although I did not wish to do the column any longer. I wanted that hundred dollars because my father said I could never get it. I must have that salary or the ferment in my sullen heart would never end.

The war had made many curtailments on the payroll, and the probability that they would raise my pay to that exorbitant figure was indeed remote.

But if they didn't, it was certain that I should quit.

And even if they offered me the sacred sum, I would sign only for a year, and that most grudgingly. I should irk every moment that I continued columning, but I would rejoice in getting the salary that should prove to all the world and to my father—but most of all to myself—that I was not a feeble-minded boy. The money itself had no meaning as money.

I delivered the absurd ultimatum: "One hundred a week after the first of the year, or I quit."

The owner of the paper tried to reason with me, but one cannot reason with a mania. They thought I would cool and be eased of my frenzy, so they told me to think it over for two weeks. They even offered to raise my pay to ninety dollars a week. But this meant nothing to me. A miss is as good as a mile. I did not greatly wish that they would give me the hundred dollars, for now the lure of my messianic novel was beginning to draw the tide of my emotion away from that high-water mark, that goal toward which I had been surging and storming in a vain frenzy of billows and foam, and now that tide was waning and receding out into the mystic marvelous ocean where the moon of my delusion walked and drew me.

Having closed my columning days with a thousand dollars in the bank, I carried my typewriter home and began writing my immortal novel. Within nine months it was finished and my money was gone.

In rejecting my novel Walter Hines Page wrote, "Either I am pretty crazy or you are."

I laughed. There could be no doubt that I was as level as the Brooklyn Bridge; and if to Mr. Page I seemed to be out of focus, it merely proved that he was as badly out of kelter as the leaning Tower of Pisa.

Later when I got squared with the Pole and told my father that his ideas were out of focus, he laughed and vowed that I and all the crazy world was skew-gee except himself, and he was as true as the needle to the Pole.

I can understand how a man can believe that he is

normal and all the rest of the world crazy, for I have believed that very thing.

As my preposterous novel was being declined by one publisher after another I pursued my search for a job but without success. The *Letter* had been sold to interests that were said to favor the German cause and all the old editors discharged, as I should have been had I remained.

My reaction to the war was simple.

Just the old feeling that the universe was falling to pieces to spite me. That Fate had seen that I was grasping for the persimmon, that I was on the verge of sitting on the world, and he had jerked the world out from under me so that I must fall.

To keep me from winning a bet that Missouri would not go Republican the Lord once had to break the Solid South.

And finally to defeat my hopes of getting a hundred dollars a week in journalism he had to shake his earthly footstool to pieces.

With my usual paranoiac irony I exclaimed: "Oh, Lord, you prevented me from getting my hundred a week, but you had to kill off forty million men to do it. If you go one or two more rounds with me, you won't have any men left."

VII

I CANVASSED every newspaper in New York without success and then I went the rounds of the trade papers. I began to believe what one editor had said, that I hadn't a friend in New York. The old numbing sense of defeat settled down upon me.

I borrowed money here and there as is the habit of men out of work.

I tried to write fiction for the magazines, but story after story came back and I couldn't understand why. Of course I had no gift for fiction; my dream was too sour.

Occasionally I would sell a poem or a joke for three or four dollars and go and spend it at once for bread and vegetables.

One night my wife and I were discussing our plight, supposing our little daughter to be asleep. Suddenly from her cot she lifted her baby voice praying and crying:

"O God, help me grow up in a minute. Make me grow up right away so I can go to work and earn some money for Mama and Daddy."

Things like this can wring the sensitive heart to the last ecstasy of mental agony.

Blindly again I turned to one who had always jibed and wounded me.

My father was after all flesh of my flesh. Now I was down and out, hungry and penniless as he had always

hoped that I would be. Perhaps now that the world had conquered me and I lay blackened and bleeding, he would be glutted of his hate and would relent and help me up and wash my wounds.

So I wrote to him again. I told him of my plight.

"When I was a boy and asked for a mandolin or asked for money to go on a Fourth of July excursion," I wrote, "your reason for denying me was this: 'Some day you may be in the direst need for bread and butter. When that time comes, I will be able to help you because I have not wasted my substance giving you mandolins and picnic excursions.'"

The time of my direst need had come.

But he answered in his usual way.

"I cannot send you any money because it would be wrong for me to encourage a fool. I saved my money so that I could help my boys in case they should ever need help, but you are past all help. You have forfeited any claims upon your father. You went East because you are too big a snob and swell-headed jackass to stay in the West where sensible folks live. You went against your father's advice, Roy, and now that you are reaping the reward of your folly I can do nothing for you except to urge that you reap it fast and take the full lesson to heart. Your reference to your wife and child is indeed pitiful, but as long as they cleave to you it will show that they are as silly as you and richly deserve their fate. Stay there and starve until you have sweated out of your foolish hide all of your folly. You are the biggest nincompoop that ever lived and if you do not yet realize it, all I can say is stay there with your empty belly until you

are willing to renounce for all time your pretensions to being a literary man.

"I tried to teach you, but you couldn't learn. I doubt if you have learned anything yet. I have always been generous in my offers to you, but my generosity has played out. From now on you get nothing. When you come home this time you have got to crawl. I have a house and plenty of bread and meat and the door is open. Come here and you can have food and shelter, but not one nickel will I send East to a braying Jackass that has got into Eastern pastures and, finding he is starved out, hasn't got sense enough to come back to God's country. I have given up my whole family because they are so far beneath my intellectual status that there can be no commerce or companionship. Hereafter I will be forced to turn for comfort to my four sisters, the only intelligent persons that I know."

VIII

BY this time the cupboard was indeed bare. So I wrote to "Rube" Levy telling him that my rent was due and I knew nowhere else to turn for a loan, having already borrowed from all my other friends.

Levy sent me a letter: "Enclosed find my check for $100. This will pay your house rent until April and by that time it will be warm enough for you to sleep on the benches in the park."

It was the kindliest of spoofing, but never was my sense of humor put to a severer test than in trying to lap the cream of merriment from his jest.

K. I. K. published every week a batch of "Manhattan Notes," and after I had called on him he ran this item: "Roy Bradley was a caller Wednesday afternoon. Jake Millikan, the janitor, also paid us a pleasant visit that day." And this convinced me that like my father, Kenyon was diabolically hounding me at every turn . . . especially now that my family and I were starving.

My hunt for a salaried job went on fruitlessly for two years, the longest and bitterest years of my life.

I had no gloves and only an old light overcoat which long use had worn thinner than ever. In going about the streets in winter when the zero blasts were howling, my bare hands narrowly missed being frozen, and the chill ate into my bones, so that sometimes I would shiver for hours after returning to a warm room.

There was little flesh on my bones to hold the warmth in my body, for I had dwindled away until I weighed but one hundred and twelve pounds with my overcoat and all. Of actual flesh and blood there was only about a hundred pounds of me, so little was left as a target for the barbed arrows of my father and K. I. K.

An Italian green grocer on a side street where I went to spend the few pennies that my poems brought me, insisted on selling me bread and vegetables at one fourth the price his other miserable customers paid.

It was the time of the Bronx and Brooklyn "food riots" when Jewish women stoned the little shops and wrecked the peddler's carts because onions had gone to eighteen cents a pound. The kind-hearted Italian said to me:

"Only the poorest people trade with me. When a man like you comes here, I know you are bigga da boss and hava hard luck. You not the kinda man eez poor like most people because they gotta no sense. I can help you now. Pretty soon you get back up on your feet again. I am no fool, I know a man when I see him. You been bigga da boss one time, you will be bigga da boss again."

The world was falling to pieces. The Germans steadily advanced and knocked one army silly after another. I went on fighting doggedly to find a job, while the life forces in me gradually evaporated.

A friend told me of a press agent job that was open and I investigated it to find that it was two weeks' work sending out press stuff from a forthcoming religious convention up-state. I was not a pep secretary. I declined it. I would be working for ministers, and I foresaw that

when it came to getting my pay—they promised me fifty dollars—they might not have the fifty dollars; indeed, it would be a miracle if they did. When my friend learned that I had rejected the job, he was puzzled, thinking that I did not want work. A healthy man in whom the tides of life run full, cannot quite comprehend the plight of a man reduced to the vigor of a living skeleton by lack of food and lack of hope.

Although I tried to face it with a lion heart, the margin of my physical strength was now so narrow that I could not talk ten sentences before my voice would break.

Spiritually I was still brave, braver than I had ever been, for I had accepted my defeat.

IX

JUST at this time I received a letter saying that my poor old mother had been stricken with paralysis. One arm and one leg hung motionless and the flesh on one side of her face sagged so that she bit her cheek and tongue when she tried to eat; and, worst of all, she did not know that anything had happened to her.

Well, I knew what was the cause of her disaster.

My father had driven his daughter away from home because she was not facile at raising chickens and handling milk and washing dishes.

Father had one particular cup and saucer out of which he would take his coffee. Give him any other cup and he would refuse to eat, just as in childhood he refused to eat his dinner unless he could have his father's used plate. Once when his father's plate had been washed he went into rebellion. My sister in washing her father's favorite cup dropped it and broke it. He had to learn to drink his coffee from another cup and this made him furious.

He had one chair in which he always sat at table and could eat from no other. It was an old office chair with springs on the hind legs which he had bought when he opened his bank in Harrow thirty years before. There was a certain silver spoon, the last of a set his mother had given him as a wedding present, and if he could not have that spoon he would not drink his coffee.

When my sister broke his coffee cup he cursed her for ineptitude.

The chickens she was trying to raise, his brood sows came and ate. And he cursed her for that.

"Don't you let your chickens out of the coop when my sows are around," he said.

She had replied: "Keep your hogs in their pen if you expect me to raise chickens for you."

But he said that brood sows needed utter freedom before they farried, so that their blood could gather all the vital elements to make the young pigs healthy. He was solicitous for the hearts and nerves of his sows, but he carried his solicitude for women only to the point of seeing that they made competent servants and handmaids to his sacred hogs.

Mother had been unable to raise any garden stuff because every garden she planted was devoured by his swine, and he would not pen them. She was Dutch and had the instinct for green food which would have prevented her veins from bursting in an apoplexy, but she could get no leafy vegetables, his sows needed them for their health, and so at last she fell stricken with paralysis.

I wrote to my sister to get greens for mother at any cost. And she had a crate of kale and cabbage shipped from Missouri. It cost eight dollars and my father stormed about it, saying eight dollars was enough to pay for green food during a whole year.

My sister had come from the nearby town where she was teaching school and had cooked some of the greens for mother and had hired a nurse to care for mother and continue to prepare vegetables and their juices for her.

As soon as my sister had returned to her school, father discharged the nurse that was tending mother.

He wrote me a self-pitying letter in which he begged me to come and help him with the housework. He said: "I now have a crippled, paralyzed old woman on my hands who is able to do nothing but eat. She has always been a big eater and now it has paralyzed her, yet she demands more expensive food than ever. If you would come here and raise a garden you would lift the burden of mother's expense. I have carried that burden for years and now some of the boys must bear it. You could do the housework and take care of mother and raise a garden, and I would not ask you to work in the fields. I cannot afford to buy greens for your mother, the cost is ruinous. She could soon eat me out of house and home. All of the Soams family were big eaters and it killed all of them except her mother who is still alive. Grandmother Soams was as big an eater as any of them, but she always took sick at the stomach after every gorge. The fact that she had a stomach muscle strong enough to heave her dinner over the fence like a fire hose playing on a two-story building is why she is alive to-day."

This letter was maddening to me.

I was bound hand and foot with a millstone about my neck, sinking with the weight of the world's despair.

I wrote a letter to my father, hoping to touch his heart. I asked him to remember her as he knew her when she gave her flower-like beauty to his life's young morning. How he had loved her then and vowed to cherish her and how his heart had leaped when she smiled at him and how lonely had been the days when she was away,

and all the other girls of the village seemed so crass and vulgar. He had thought then that no earthly fabric could be fine enough to clothe such beauteous flesh and no chivalry too tender for his radiant girl.

I asked him to recall his old love letters and picture her singing in the village concerts with an ostrich plume in her hat and her voice ringing like an echo out of heaven.

How proud he had been to walk along those frontier streets with Lillian, the loveliest girl of all the prairies.

I asked him to remember her as a young mother holding their first-born baby in her arms. And to recall the seven sons that she had borne him with such hope and uncomplaining heart. And how he had written the tenderest poem when at last a daughter had been born, "Dad's only girl."

I pictured the long gray days of toil upon that desolate farmstead, and how mother used to take her tired hands from the last dishwater and go to her piano and "fill the night with song."

And the years, that gnawed at the heartstrings of love, had rusted away the strings of her old piano till at last they snapped and were mute. And how mother had yearned for a new piano, fingering the old broken keys with longing, dreaming amid the dust of fallen days.

And how father had been too thrifty to buy a new piano and the children who loved the sound of her singing were poor and broken, scattered helplessly afar.

And now our mother lay stricken and it was too late to give her the one gift for which she had pined.

The hands that would have pressed the keys in rapture

now were palsied and her heart would never sing again.

But on the faded wreck of what had once been mother we could lavish love, and we could kiss those cheeks deformed, and somehow send a message to her shrinking soul that love, love and gratitude, were the last notes on the harp of life and the last words of the mortal story.

And it seems that my brother Tom wrote a letter to father that was all but identical with mine. At once he conceived the idea that this was a conspiracy! Tom and I were trying to work upon his sentiment so that he would grow rash and spend his money on mother. It was a conspiracy to swindle and rob him. The Puritan always believes that the rest of the world is in league to humiliate him.

In the depths of my own despair I had fancied that New York was built to bait me, that Harvard put forth her haughty, chocolate éclair *kultur* with the sole purpose of deriding and exasperating me. Books were published, societies formed, whole lives lived along a premeditated pattern—and that pattern was a world-wide plot to put me under a disadvantage, to make me the cringing victim of a world's ridicule and laughter.

I could therefore understand how my father believed that the letters from Tom and myself pleading with him to treat mother decently were part of an inimical satiric plot against him. We were demons who would reduce him to impotence by evaporating his money. For he had now fused in the identity of his money his own identity. He and his lucre, of which he possessed now more than one hundred thousand dollars, were one personality. Surely a man with a hundred thousand dollars could be

no weakling, coward and fool. This had been his unreasoned purpose in accumulating his hoard, he would prove to himself and to the world that he was not a timid and inferior man, and he would prove it by being worth $100,000.

Like a true son of that blood, I had been following in his footsteps. I had fixed on "a hundred a week" as the salary that could banish the vampire bats that fanged and tore my cringing character and fought with one another for my ego's blood.

Set a thief to catch a thief, and to track down a madman, set a madman on his trail. I knew my father's secret. I had his pattern. I could unravel him like a man of straw.

I decided to go home, but not a beaten man surrendering to my father's despotism. I would go to raise a garden for my mother in the hope that I could nurse her back to health again. I would massage her palsied limbs and give her proper food and pour a song of hope into her heart, and if ever the old spirit warmed again and she regained the use of her worn-out hands, I would order a new piano and if father lifted a voice of protest, I would choke him into submission. But first would be a long course of green food in her diet, and to raise the green vegetables I would have to fence the hogs out of the garden.

So I wrote to father that my coming was conditioned on his pledge to buy fencing material and to enclose the garden which he was so solicitous for me to plant.

He replied with curtness that he would bind himself to no such promise. Seeing that I was whipped, he would

have an unconditional surrender. I saw his purpose then. He wanted me to come and raise that green truck, not for mother but for his hungry brood sows. My affection for my mother was the bait he used, but what he wanted was my wife's labor in the kitchen for himself and his farm hands and my own labor in the garden for his hogs. I confess that he almost trapped me. A friend who had known me as a lad in Kansas and was now established in New York pointed out the simple purpose of my father.

"You would be a fool to go," he said. "He would herd his hogs in your garden and you would fail to help your mother in the least. But the old man would have you penniless and broken just as he has your mother. Had she rebelled before her spirit broke, while she still had strength to lift a hand, she could have been saved. But now it is too late."

X

IT was a German neighborhood in which I was living in the Bronx. Not far from me lived a man whom I considered another miserable egotist who dreamed of dominating the world to vindicate his own insignificance. His name was Leon Trotsky and he was an assistant editor of the Russian newspaper in New York called *Novy Mir*, "the new time coming." Because of my socialistic slant I had been drawn into a group of radical Russians. They recognized their own kind and adopted me into the tribe. Andrev Berg, business manager of the Russian paper, was one of the most intelligent of the group. They were all miserably poor, Trotsky and Berg each earning a salary of $12.50 a week. Karl Marx was their Messiah.

The Russian military front had collapsed and I saw these *Novy Mir* men suddenly become comparatively rich.

Andrev Berg had plenty of money for the first time. He told me that if I would see Trotsky it could be arranged for me to go to Russia on a mysterious mission that would mend my fortunes and enable me to do a service to mankind.

He was guarded and secretive, and finding that he could not interest me in his mysterious mission, he dropped the subject and laid another proposition before

me. There was a famous Russian monk, one Iliodor, who had been driven from Russia by Rasputin, the madman that ruled the Czar.

This Iliodor was hiding in the Bronx, and Andrev would take me to him and introduce me as an American who could get his story into print. Andrev told me what the Iliodor manuscript contained, and I realized that it was rich material for the magazines.

I did not call on the monk, for I could speak no Russian and he knew no English. But I arranged with Andrev Berg for Berg to phrase in his crude English the Iliodor revelations and I would put Berg's transcript into literary English and organize it into a series of magazine articles.

With this in view I sought the managing editor of Hillier's Weekly and told him what I had.

He laughed in my face and said: "You are an ignorant rustic who knows nothing of Russia. If you were Richard Washburn Child you might come here and talk to me about this story."

I staggered from the office weak and exhausted. His words had been like a blood-letter's leeches to me.

When I reported to the satiric Andrev Berg, he smiled a twisted leer and tucked a fifty-dollar bill in my pocket. Money was no object to the twelve-dollar-a-week newspaper man in these new days that had come upon him, and he went forth and hired a Harvard writer to present the Iliodor story to the next Harvard editor on the list. The story was bought for $20,000 and later suppressed at the instance of the Russian Ambassador who made a trip from Washington to the magazine office in New York.

Soon there was no Czar and Andrev Berg and Trotsky were on their way to Russia.

But being the perfect American ass, I had missed totally the historical significance of Russia's sudden emergence among the nations, just as I entirely failed to see that Trotzky was a social scientist, laboring always in the laboratory of history. But with asinine credulity I accepted current prejudices as history. . . . I was like Stendhal's young hero after the Battle of Waterloo. My only recollection of one of the greatest hours in the world's history, was, "I am damned hungry."

XI

MY attitude towards life ceased to be complex. It all seemed simple now. Some individuals prosper, some are destroyed. Some races win and others lose.

I happened to belong to a race that was losing. They were to be stamped out without a struggle. I at least had struggled; I had gone down fighting.

But my tribe, the American forward-lookers, too-proud-to-fighters, Harvard piffle-mongers, were going to the ash heap with the print of a German toe on their pantaloons. I love to see an arrogant race crushed and cast whining into oblivion. I am a mean guy and I exult in such a wholesome extermination even though I and my own tribe be the ones that are exterminated. Down with all self-kidding weaklings. Damn them.

I wrote a series of comic essays and sold them to a Sunday paper. My sister sent me news that mother was recovering from her paralysis.

Life, after all, is exactly like the pattern in the story books.

The plot thickens through the third act, agony is piled on agony and the curtain falls on utter darkness—the dark hour that is darkest in that it is the last hour of darkness before the dawn.

A world war is a big event to most people. But as the

penniless negro said about the noon hour—"It is only twelve o'clock to me." I had passed through all passions, fears, frenzies, all of hope, sacrifice, defeat, despair and reconstruction—in my own ego, before the clock struck twelve for America to enter on the drunken feast of carnage. To all my countrymen it was the noon of their emotional gluttony, but to me it was just twelve o'clock upon the dial face of Time.

There was a great scurrying to and fro of Nordics who were cowards, all in a flutter to elude their destiny, and I took notes on many of my friends and vowed that henceforth they were alien to me.

It was at this time that my brother Tom had hurried to the recruiting office . . . to be laughed at. It was this grand sleep-walking scene that sealed that Don Quixote as a true brother of mine. I knew that it was useless for me to offer myself. I weighed but a hundred pounds, being sixty-five pounds under weight.

I looked through the occupational list to see if there was any craft demanded by the military organization wherein my skill could count. In the list of some hundred trades there was but one, that of axman—the art of the broad ax wielder hewing timbers for bridges and railroad ties. I notified the draft board that when they wanted a hundred-pound axman—it being the weight of the man not the ax—I would contribute my services with eagerness.

I was disgusted with the men who were terrorized. Epidemic terror is the cheapest of mob passions, and all the mob passions are cheap stuff—to the man who has become an individual.

When, here and there, one of my friends cringed with terror I remarked: "Well, I have only a hundred pounds of meat for the Germans to embezzle, and at sixteen cents a pound I stand to lose only sixteen dollars if they get me."

My own hysteria I had reduced and analyzed, and now the war hysteria caught my tribe.

While the mob fused in solution, I had crystallized.

When men were melting in the mass I had become an individual.

And when the herd had all become one, I was not one of the herd. I had the pleasure of sitting on the fence and watching the war go by.

I was not a socialist, for I had learned that socialism is merely the hallucinations of a weak soul afraid to be born.

It is the same as religion, the hallucinations of weak flesh afraid to die.

Omar said, "Hell is but the shadow of a soul on fire." Socialism is the greedy viscera looking at the picture of what it wants to eat.

I was not a patriot, for I was waiting for the 1920 census—to learn whether this country was Dutch, Russian or Scandinavian, and until then I would not know what country to love.

K. I. K. went to the war, was commissioned captain and assigned to write his Col-yum for the doughboys. The doughboys didn't have a Harvard complex and panned the war colyum and called it sissy crap. I rather chuckled at this as I am a small-souled ungenerous wretch,

and besides, if you're going to have a war, why not let it crack every head. It wasn't my war; I couldn't control it. I had decided to cease bossing the universe; let the Lord run it and run it rough, and those that couldn't stand it could squeal like hell—that's what I had had to do when the big world played too roughly with me.

I was urged to go to Washington and hold down a swivel chair as a courageous captain of propaganda, an eater of the harried people's taxes. Not for me; I was building up my self-respect. As soon as K. I. K. began Col-yum-yumming the doughboys I began to gain weight.

The incubus was lifted at last and I began to march. There were only two left now, the Kaiser and my father. I rubbed my hands and smiled.

I was in a restaurant one evening when one of my pro-German friends related with lugubrious protest how the French employed black troops so barbarous that they cut off the ears of the Germans and strung them in necklaces.

"Say no more," I said. "You torture me. You make me hungry for smoked Germans' ears and this is meatless Monday." Life had made my own ears cauliflower. The war had become a big cosmic joke to me.

Everything was a joke. The solemn enunciations of Woodrow Wilson amused me. I afterwards learned that he was serious, he believed what he said.

Then the war ended suddenly . . . to me the din and turmoil of Armistice Day was the snap of a broken rubber band. . . . I was charmed with a satiric picture of the Kaiser packing coffee in a Thermos bottle and, before fleeing the revolution, having the throne tattooed on his

seat. . . . We poor defeated devils love to see great men fall from their perches. . . . As they go crashing to the ground we scream with them—the asses condoling the apes. . . .

XII

WITH such a great event closed, let me return again to the Bradley saga.

After Tom's return from Mexico, before he started his little paper in the village of Cracken, Nebraska, he had first gone to the old farm in Kansas.

But no sooner had he come and put his shoulder to the wheel than father laid the lash upon his back. He cursed Tom for everything that he did. He drove him at his labor until he was blinded and dizzy with the heat, and when Tom stopped in the hayfield and staggered to the well to get a drink of water, father threw a pitchfork at him.

One time Tom went to the mail box while his father was hitching the horses to the hay wagon. Tom saw the mail carrier coming. The poor fellow was expecting a letter from his wife, their baby being ill, and he waited a few minutes until the mail carrier arrived.

Father, as usual, grew frantic and cursed him for his idleness. When Tom returned from the mail box, father tried to hit him in the head with a monkey wrench. Dull as Tom always was to the perception of reality, he now felt that such frantic tantrums, if they were evidences of fatherly love, were being carried too far.

One day when Tom was digging for a foundation to add a front room to the house—as the back rooms of the old shack rotted down father would from time to time

add new rooms to the front—his spade upturned the clay and gravel where the two babies had been buried many years before.

The tiny skeletons with ribs like squirrels' bones, set deep emotions stirring in his haunted breast. He looked up from this pathetic pile and saw the weary mother leaning in the doorway, supported by her crutch.

Bones, bones, bones, she had been always making bones, clothed in agony to be forever driven and thwarted, humiliated and crucified by that proud, clear-thinking, forward-looking American who was part author of their being and wholly the author of their undoing and despair. Tom looked to where father, under a shade tree, was stirring the mortar for the new room. He looked again at his drooping mother, a spirit all resigned to woe. Tom's smothering emotion almost halted his power to speak. Here were the relics of the little brothers whose great fortune it had been to die at birth. The mother, looking at them now, could not regret it.

"What shall I do with these bodies?" Tom huskily asked of his father.

"Put them here at the foot of this tree," father said, leering merrily. "Put them anywhere. Go on with your digging." Tom laid the bones at the foot of the tree, and father, walking over them, gradually tramped them into the soil.

. . . . . .

A mystery arose in that household as to why the hens were laying gritty eggs. Every day when the cooked eggs were served at the table, whether fried, poached or made into an omelette, they were full of grit or sand. Mother

washed the skillet most carefully. She took pains that no particles of eggshell got into the eggs. She used no scouring powder in cleaning the dishes, and still the grit was in the egg. Meanwhile the hens had scratched the little skeletons apart under the maple tree and had eaten the bones for the lime.

This grit in the eggs began to rouse the phantoms of superstitious fear down in the lower caverns of the heart. Father was determined to center all inquiry on how there could be grit in the ova he devoured.

There is a fable of a mother who put stones in a bag and let the father devour them instead of devouring the children.

At last the mystery was solved and the haunting phantoms scattered. In the ceiling of the kitchen there were great holes in the plastering like the third act of a melodrama wherein is pictured misery in a garret with the bare ribs of the lathing in big patches glaring forth the symbol and the sign of poverty.

Now, one of these bare-ribbed ceiling holes in father's palace was just above the cook stove. And there the cat in the rafters was wont to come and lie upon the grating of laths to enjoy the warm air coming up at breakfast time. The lazy movements of this basking cat would rattle down a little sand from the old plastering, and this was the secret of grit in the omelette.

Father was a finicky man and would make no attempt to accustom himself to sandy eggs. Then surely (you venture) he spent a little money and had the holes in the ceiling repaired? Not he. He killed the cat.

Thereafter the invading rats that swarmed in all the

cribs and granaries came in the house and bit the sleepers in their beds.

But Tom was no longer there. Disgusted when father had tried to strike him with a monkey wrench—he had gone away broken-hearted to take up again the struggle with a world he did not understand.

The youngest boy, Arthur, tormented and bitten by rats until he could not sleep, decided he, too, would go away. He was seventeen years old and had never passed through the primary grades at school. He had obediently stayed at home, toiling under his father's mastership as best he could. But the rats had proved too much for even his genial nature.

"Mother," he said one morning, "I am not going to the field to-day. I am leaving this place. I am going out into the world to get a good night's sleep and then see what I can find to do.

"Father and I can never agree.

"I do not understand a man of his nature. He does not understand a nature like mine.

"Of late years he has become so domineering and hateful that I would have left here long ago, but I have stayed because of my love of you.

"I have seen my sister driven away with curses and insults. I have seen all my brothers, one after another, driven away in the same manner.

"I have been cursed and pounded as much as the rest of them and I suppose Dad thought I took it meekly because I had no intelligence. He is always talking about having 'raised a family of fools.' But I took his cursings and beatings because I believed that by staying here I

could be the means of protecting you and finally getting you a decent house to live in.

"Mother, do you know that from your lips I have heard the only kind words that ever fell to me? I am the youngest of the family. They say that in other days father was a kinder man, that he used to laugh and fondle his children. But I came upon the scene after all that was a memory of better days.

"Father has never said a kind word to me since I was old enough to remember. I have had nothing but sneers and curses. If I could do you any good by staying, I would stay.

"But what could I do? And so, mother, let me kiss you and go away—God knows where."

We Bradleys always spoke like balladists or psalmists.

A resurgence of the fighting spirit blazed up in mother's heart. She followed Arthur out into the door yard and called father from the barn.

Arthur repeated to him his new resolve—that peacefully and without recriminations he was going away because there was no reason to believe that he and his father could ever get along together.

"That's right," said father. "You're no good, like the rest of them. But you have done the best you could; you have never fought back at me. If you insist on leaving me, deserting your father under his increasing burdens, at least you are friendly about it. We can shake hands and part in peace."

They struck hands, and Arthur turned toward the road.

Tears gushed from mother's eyes as she made her last plea. "John," she said, "remember this boy hasn't a

penny in his pockets. He has spent all his life working for you and has never had a dollar given to him by way of wages for his work. He has had no schooling. Remember, you said that education ruined the other boys and you were going to make a man of this boy by giving him no education. Now he is going out into the world without education or equipment of any kind. He has no profession and no trade. All he can do is the crude work of a farm hand. At this time of year no farmers are hiring hands. He would have to beg his bread or starve."

"You're right," said father triumphantly.

"Then you must give him some money," she said, and father's triumph fell. "For seven years here he has been your farm hand, doing the work that you pay Bohemian boys $400 a year to do. You admit that he has been faithful and that he has never been insubordinate. You shan't let this faithful boy go away with nothing."

"Well, I guess that's right, too," said father. And to the last of his sons he gave for the first time his parting blessing and some money.

He handed Arthur five dollars!

The lad bought a ticket to a neighboring town, paid for supper, bed and breakfast in a cheap hotel, and faced his new life in this merry world without a penny.

XIII

"DEAR Granddaughter Priscilla: I am very much worried about Lillian." (Her daughter—my mother.) "I am afraid she will do something desperate. She wrote me a letter that was very queer and not at all like Lillian. She says she has nothing left to live for now that the last of her children is gone." (Arthur, the one who never went to school.) "She said that she would put herself out of the world if she had any means of doing it. I am greatly alarmed for her; she must be very sick and out of her mind. Please go to her at once and see what you can do. I am terribly anxious about my daughter."

This letter was written by Grandmother Soams in Nebraska who was in her ninetieth year, the woman whom father had said was a hearty eater but had long been preserved to the pleasures of this world because she was blessed with a stomach muscle that reacted with sufficient reflex to hurl her dinner over the hedge where it could no longer annoy her.

Grandmother's stomach muscle had kept life in her body and as long as there is life in a woman there is concern to defend her offspring; and this old woman, ripe for the grave, was still solicitous for the safety of "my daughter."

The letter was written to my sister Priscilla who was

teaching school in Kansas. She forwarded the letter to me, saying that the only hope of saving mother was to take her to the home of one of her children. I was the only one that had a home. "If you have room for her," my sister wrote, "take her in. If you have no room, there is nothing that can be done. The old house has rotted down until there are only two rooms not yet unroofed. All the junk, beds, cook stove, table, seed corn—have been piled in this compass, and there mother, too weak to rise from her chair, sits and broods upon the wreckage of her life—and ours. Father is impatiently waiting for her to die. She has told him that if he would provide some means for her to kill herself she would gladly make her exit."

When affairs have come to such a pass as this, I thought, is it still possible to save the day? Was not mother's mind, her will to resist, too far gone, now, ever to react if rescue should come? At last I had money, in spite of father and all the evil genius that opposed me. I telegraphed my sister asking her to leave her school and go and get mother and bring her to me. Would this message reach my mother before she was dead?

. . . . . .

When I saw my beloved sister disembarking from the train she lifted down a shrunken little creature that seemed to hark back to an age incredibly remote.

It looked not like my mother but like my grandmother's mother.

What a change a few years and a century of agony had wrought.

I had not thought that the handsome, august, buxom

figure of a woman in her fifties—as I had last seen her—could have shrunk to this frail mummy, so light that I could easily lift her with one arm.

Then I remembered how despair had wasted my own body until it had been as a miracle that life still harbored there. And I had come back from that state of breathing mummyhood; and my soul had taken hold on life and flesh again.

. . . . . .

My mother recognized me, and her mind, though easily fluttered like a wind-fooled candle, still burned with the continuous light of sanity. He that endureth unto the end shall be saved.

We installed her in our home which was like a palace and a heaven to her. My sister tarried with us several days before returning to Kansas. The sight of beautiful things, of roofs that did not leak, of people who laughed and kissed and spoke tenderly to one another—this to my mother was the most potent medicine she ever drank. For the last fifteen years she had heard nothing but whinings and cursings. She had never seen a photoplay. Vaudeville had been invented since she was on earth before. She had not seen a theatrical performance since old days in Wilber, Nebraska, when they sang:

> Over the garden wall, the sweetest girl of all,
> There never were yet such eyes of jet;
> And you can bet I'll never forget,
> The night our lips in kisses met,
> Over the garden wall.

The first thing we told her was that she was never

going back to the old pigsty in Kansas. And she said: "Now I can live."

My wife and I massaged her palsied hands and told her that she would soon learn to walk again. And soon the glow came back to her cheeks and strength to her limbs. She had given me life and taught my helpless feet to walk; she had put courage in my heart and showed me how to face the world and conquer. It was my privilege now to pay her back the debt in kind. Within a week she was walking about the house. Then we took her to the movies, old tired stuff for us, and we had banned it long ago, but mother looked on this drama with a heart of wonder, and we took new interest in the spectacle as a mother views a picnic through the eyes of her happy child.

We taught mother to walk a block at a time and finally she could walk all the way to the neighborhood picture theater alone. She had come back from the very dust of death and the tenancy of the grave and now she was living in heaven on earth and youth and life for her were just beginning.

I wrote to father the letter that had been coming to him all these years. I told him that the trouble with him was that he had never been disciplined. Persons who are undisciplined in youth must have their arrogance taken out of them in old age when it is too late. And when their calamity comes it crushes them. I had met calamity while I was still young enough to profit by it. The world had rolled over me and stamped its initials on my hide. And now wherever I go I bow, and men can read, "He is the World's man, its brand is on his neck."

I ended my letter in a flourish of dire warning:

"The Kaiser has fallen. Now it is John Bradley's turn.

"Your wife is not dying: instead she is strong and vital in spirit and ready for your undoing. Half of the property is hers, both in legal title and in the terrible title of having given all her years to help you pile up the wealth of lands and moneys. Give her her share at once or take the consequence of a disgusting law suit."

I felt cheerful, enlivened. At last, after the years, I was to see justice overtake John Bradley, who, in some vague, vague past time had been my father. . . .

XIV

THE resolution, to enjoy what little life was left her, made mother militant and resourceful. She consulted a lawyer and learned she was entitled to one half of the farm lands. The lawsuit she immediately launched fell like a bombshell into the life of the miser. He got busy, determined to fight every inch of the way, and I gloated to see him stricken with fear and anxiety.

Father offered brother Tom the "hog's share" of the inheritance if he would stand with him in opposing mother's suit for her half of the property. He was not talking the language of Tom Bradley's soul. Tom cared nothing for money. Trying to bribe him to cheat his mother was like trying to bribe Don Quixote to steal a necklace from the throat of the Virgin's image. Tom Bradley's one aim in life was ideal justice.

The memory of the babies' bones, dug up before his mother's eyes and trampled by the cynical father, was the kind of argument to win Tom.

Then father told him I had instigated the suit. That I wanted mother to have her money so that I could wean it from her and found an editorial weekly and buy a country place in Virginia. Tom was ass enough to believe this yarn.

Brother Wilbur was next approached by father with an offer of the hog's share of the estate if he would oppose

mother. And that stomach-led socialist was won. He had a special reason for feeling vindictive toward me, for he had borrowed several hundred dollars from me and offered to repay it by beating me to death.

The third brother that my father approached with the offer of the lion's share of his money if he would oppose mother's rights was the oldest son, John Cark Bradley, Jr. Johnnie is the one that told us that as long as force ruled the world he would use his deadly fist to make the rest of us boys submit implicitly to his dictation. When I began to make a name in journalism he told me: "Roy, don't you know it's pretty hard on me, being the oldest of the family, to see another brother cutting a larger figure in the world." He expected me to sympathize with him in his pangs of remorse because I was getting along. I dutifully commiserated with him as far as possible.

After father had approached Johnny, that vivacious son wrote to mother that he would appear in court against her and prevent her from getting her money. He was a self-confident fellow! I had once seen him lift his fist to strike mother when she had reprimanded him for some misconduct, a sight so sickening that I can never recall it without a shudder. Now he wrote to mother: "I am the eldest son, but I have never had my rights, and I intend to get them now. From the time you nursed me on the bottle instead of at your breast, I have been given counterfeit values, pushed aside with secondary consideration. Having silently suffered mistreatment all my life, I now intend to speak. I do not intend to have my inheritance dissipated by your getting half the property and blowing it away foolishly on the hare-brained schemes of Roy. If

you get a divorce and a division of the property, Dad says he will marry again, and I know he will," etc.

This man was forty years old and a few days before he wrote this letter he had received a letter from mother, written in the new joy that had come to her since she had been rescued from poverty and heartsickness. The letter was written to congratulate him on his fortieth birthday and was full of a mother's love and pride in her first born. And he had answered with the letter about his mistreatment from suckling days. This so seared mother's heart that when he died suddenly of the influenza a few weeks later, I know it was an anodyne to her grief. As for me, I was glad that another obstacle was out of the way. A man can get entirely fed up on some of the banquet courses served upon this mundane board. And in many ways I have been fed to repletion.

The Puritans will cry in superstitious terror, "You mustn't say such things! You mustn't say anything!" And I reply, "You'll play hell stopping me now."

XV

THE trial of the lawsuit contrived a reunion for the scattered Bradleys. We foregathered at Fairview which is the county seat of Richland County and is ten miles from Harrow. There is but one hotel in that county capital, and all the parties to mother's suit met under the same roof and ate in the same dining room. Mother had come from Nebraska where she had been visiting her old mother. Our lawyer, Ike Parks, an old-time neighbor in Kansas who had made a name as an expert in the handling of farmers' divorce troubles, had come on from Chicago. I made the trip from New York.

Attorney Parks and I found mother smiling and militant, ready to make the first and last fight for her own freedom and happiness. Life, which I had found a long swim through revolting ordure, had not much embittered, but subdued and saddened me. I saw by the glances and the undertones of my old neighbors that they regarded me as a villain. But also I knew they had no affection for my father, for he had long flouted and condemned them and pinched them for every penny he could get in all his dealings.

As the lawyer and I sat eating our luncheon in the hotel dining room my gaze wandered to a neighboring table where sat a calm young man of about twenty-four. Nobility of blood was written in every lineament of his features. His face seemed to glow with a god-like aura

as he gazed serenely over the rude gathering of farm folk and fat-headed grocery drummers.

I directed Parks's attention to him. "Did you ever see so fine a Grecian head?" I asked. "Do you suppose that boy belongs to this gross prairie soil; could Kansas have produced and nurtured such a figure? And if he is sprung from this accursed and hostile soil, and of this mongrel, cringing and defeated race, he must feel like an alien here."

I saw him again after supper. He came up and gave me his hand.

"I'm Arthur," he said. I had not seen him in years, and then he was a gangling lad in ragged overalls.

"Why didn't you make yourself known before?" I asked as I embraced him.

He replied that he had not been summoned to the trial, but that he had quietly drifted in and looked us all over and listened to our unguarded conversation before making up his mind.

Together we went to the depot to meet the incoming Tom Bradley, that quaint soul, whom Arthur and I both loved. Tom arrived, weary but soldierly. He was suspicious of me and of the lawyer, and held us at a distance.

"Why are you so eager to win this case?" he asked.

I told him that I had been fighting every day of my life since I left home, and that having entered this fight for mother I intended to hit hard, as I had learned to hit and be hit in my struggles with the big world, the world of reality which knows no pity for weaklings.

We three brothers returned to the hotel where we met father and his two lawyers. Father did not look a day

older than Tom and me. There was no gray in his bushy brown hair nor in his mustache. He was clean shaven and handsome and held his head high. Tom and I were both gray-bearded men, but we shaved off the tell-tale bristles. There were many white hairs in my head and Tom's (but now, several years after that meeting, my gray hairs have disappeared), and we were bent and drooping.

We shook hands with father and spoke calmly and deferentially. His two dull, wolfish lawyers were nonplussed, as they had expected us to bark, foam and snap at him. We made no reference to the lawsuit of the morrow but talked on general topics. The hotel owner, noticing the family resemblance between me and my father and the similarity in voice and mannerism, said: "John, you can never disown this one," meaning that he could not deny the family likeness.

Father flashed back: "Oh, I don't intend to disown him. I just intend to give him a hell of a good licking to show him that his father is still boss."

I smiled and took it in the old humble way. This was to be the last time he could indulge his preposterous wit with the old-time relish.

A man who is about to be hanged is permitted to enjoy the best breakfast he can order. I conceded to Dad his last feasting on me.

Another old neighbor remarked to me: "You're not like you used to be, always joking and laughing. You were the most hilarious boy I ever knew."

I replied: "I am not so hilarious now. Life has sobered me and taught me many lessons."

Again my father cut in laughing: "Yes, and a hell of a big lesson yet remains for you to learn, and I'm going to teach it to you to-morrow."

The next morning as we walked from the hotel to the courthouse, I said to father: "Let us not go into this contest without having made some attempt to settle our private affairs in private."

He said: "What is your offer?"

"Suppose," I said, "that you give mother thirty thousand dollars in Liberty bonds. At four per cent. this will give her a hundred dollars a month to live on. You can disinherit me and Tom and Arthur and sister Priscilla, for we have agreed that we don't want your money but desire only mother's happiness.

"You have at least $100,000. If you will give mother $30,000 you will still have $70,000, to be all yours and no further claims from us. The accrued interest will soon build your fortune back to $100,000 and, as I say, it will be all yours and when you die you can give it to the sons that stood by you in this suit and denounced the claims of mother."

"Thirty thousand dollars to mother," he said scornfully. "Do you think that is fair?" We were mounting the courthouse steps.

"Before God I do!" I cried.

The neighbors could have heard me.

"Hush," he said. "Don't talk so loud."

"Oh, no," I replied. "The hush-up days are over. This is my time to talk, and I talk loud from now on."

His attorneys advised him to accept this offer for a settlement. I told him that this sum must be sent to

mother and that in addition he must pay her lawyer, whose fee would be most moderate. The clock in the courtroom pointed to the hour for court to convene.

Father said he would give mother the thirty thousand.

"And will you pay my fee for negotiating this settlement?" asked our attorney.

"Not by a damn sight," said father.

"Go to trial," said the lawyer. And he assisted mother to the witness chair.

One of the incidents that amused us was quite shocking to father's counsel. When mother was relating how father had pestered one of her sons from babyhood with the assertion that he would never be able to make a living, and often used to say to her in the hearing of that son: "Mother, we've raised a foolish child," father broke out with a demoniac laugh and arose and pointed to me, chuckling triumphantly until his lawyers pulled him down into his chair.

I saw by the look on the judge's face that our cause was won.

Mother told how the old furniture wore out and rotted away and was replaced by abandoned furniture left on the place by the families of tenant farmers. The stove on which she had cooked until paralyzed was an old one thrown away by a family from Arkansas, who on departing had not deemed it worth carrying to their next stand. The dining table was one that mother had made herself out of old planks.

When she became helpless she had offered to go to a home for destitute old folks where she could be cared for and have a water-tight roof over her head, and father

had consented to send her, but had balked on paying the $500 necessary to enable her to be admitted.

She told how father put her in a chair by the fire one morning without combing her hair or giving her any breakfast, and how he had built up a big fire and gone to the fields to work until noon. The stove grew red hot and mother was cooking alive, unable to move because of paralysis. A neighbor, happening to drop in, had pulled her away from the red-hot stove in time to save her.

Brother Tom, on the stand, told a similar tale of abuse and tragedy, but so colored it with a mordant and unearthly humor that the judge, not understanding his rare genius, thought he was a simpleton.

When Arthur, the uneducated one, who had floated slyly into the case to spy out things for himself, was asked (as an impromptu venture by our lawyer) to take the witness stand, the opposition caught a porcupine. He told how his father had refused to let him go to school because "education had made damn fools of the other boys and he said he was going to make a man of me."

He related how his father had later condemned his own handiwork, cursed him as a fool and finally set him adrift with five dollars in his pockets. He testified that mother had universally been kind to him.

Father's leading lawyer then took hold of the boy and began to bulldoze.

"Isn't it a fact," he yelled with a strident voice that would have cut the tar off a rubberoid roof, "that everything your father ever told you was wrong and everything your mother ever told you was right?"

"No," said the blue-eyed, handsome fellow calmly.

"Tell an instance when your father reprimanded you and he was right and when your mother reprimanded you and she was wrong!" That same sour, piercing voice that would drown the scream of a sawmill.

"My mother told me that I ought not to go to dances with the village girls, and she was wrong, for there could be no harm in young blood getting together, it is the way the world keeps going. That's once when mother was wrong. When father learned that I had taken up pipe-smoking he scolded me for the harmful habit, and though I did not heed his advice, I knew that he was right."

The lawyer tried a few more bludgeonings, but Arthur calmly parried every rush, and floored him with the return blow. The second lawyer seized the first one by the coat-tails and pulled him away. Father had indeed made a man out of that boy. In his hands father and his lawyers were like children.

Father fatuously thought he was winning the case until the judge told him to give mother $2,000 that night and $47,000 before the expiration of three months. With surprise on his face he turned to his lawyers and exclaimed: "We're licked!"

That evening mother reigned at the hotel like an empress receiving homage. The long nightmare was over and she was triumphant. She had given her Dutch fighting blood to four of her children, three sons and a daughter. By virtue of that blood they had come through the miasma of a Puritan culture and had blown that sickly fog away from them to breathe the air of sanity. For her and them the Alden pilgrim curse was laid forever.

Founding a family is a trait that has always run in our family. I have shown how father founded his.

After mother had won her victory over father and had her own money, she went to Los Angeles. There she built herself the cottage of her dreams and is now living there happily among her old pioneer neighbors. Arthur and Tom went back to their country papers serene in the knowledge that they are not half-men but men.

To get as far away as possible from Kansas and John Brown's body, I went to work on an old newspaper in Charleston, South Carolina, where Sumter blazed the last defiance to the Puritan demon.

XVI

NOW let me lay low another scion of our conquering clan.

What of Joe Geeshan whom education was to make the smartest man in America?

In the county where Joe grew up and to which county he shrunk back again, the leading banker and political boss is a sorghum lapper named Freddie Ireland who was Joe's chum in boyhood.

"Why," Joe asked of Banker Ireland, "do I amount to nothing? I aimed high and fought hard. For twenty years no question came to me that I did not answer, I entered no debate but that I won it, no mind has scored on mine, no man has jibed me but I crushed him on the comeback. With all this wit, with all this preparation, with all the effort I lavished in my climb, I am now back on the dunghill where I started. I am zero."

"It is your damned Alden blood that balked you," Ireland said. "The Aldens are teachers, that's what your mother used to say—the Aldens are teachers. That is true, they always teach; they never learn. They cannot learn to quit teaching! Being born of that blood you were doomed from the start. You talk of your education; you don't know anything. I am the educated one, for I know what I'm up against. Everything in life has taught me something. From you I learned not to be a Smart Alec. You made many a jest at my expense, and I would have

knocked the tar out of you, but that your mother used always to give me hot ginger cookies when I was playing at your house. Her kindness and her cookies made me your friend. Had she gone through life ahead of you handing out ginger cookies and keeping a gag in your mouth you would have a million friends instead of just one. Never hand a man a witty remark unless you are prepared to smash him with your fist to make him like it. Your father never attacked a man with his tongue but that he followed it with his fist. A man like you, who hasn't got the courage of your convictions should get rid of your convictions.

"I, myself, am not fond of physical combat, so I used my educable mind to learn how to avoid as much hostility as possible. Not wanting to fight I kept out of fights. I am now master of this community because I am the best educated man here. These people taught me how to handle them. When I was a hog-raiser I never kicked a hog; I stroked their ears or scratched their backs with a curry-comb, and studied swine psychology until I got rich out of a hog herd; I learned how to handle them in such a way that they never had the cholera. I was born just diplomatic enough to handle hogs and that's why I'm here, the master of my bailiwick. You were born of a race that can't manage anything but desires to rule the world."

Joe's ego had cracked. Thereafter he made no effort. And that winter he died. He had lived his whole life under a delusion. All the educational organism in Kansas was built to foster that delusion, not to crack it. It taught mediocrity to be arrogant. It taught that the Puritans are a chosen people and that by skillful dialectic

they can ram their offensive delusions down the throat of the world. The Hottentots teach a similar tribal propaganda and call it education.

This is what the University of Kansas tried to teach me, but I was already revolted against it. The pep secretary who had preached high-sounding sermons and then picked my pockets had shown me how little meaning there was in the tribal rigmarole.

I have always felt kindly toward Dr. Olin Templin, the professor of philosophy, who denounced the other professors on the disciplinary committee at Kansas University for calling me a liar when they could not prove I lied. After a score of years I returned to Lawrence and visited him.

"It seems," he told me, "that education is another fallacy; it has blown up like free silver and socialism. Here in Kansas we grew up to believe that education was the cure-all that would end the ills of the world if once its magic formula could be applied to all. In Kansas a complete education has been given to everybody. Yet the ills of Kansas are uncured and the world is in as bad a fix as it ever was in—worse, it seems."

"The test of the uneducated man is that he believes in magic," that is an axiom of philosophy. Yet the Kansans believed in magic. And education was the magic that they believed in. It was their third magic formula. First it was abolition, then it was prohibition and then education. And after all this sorcery, witchcraft and alchemy, the dross of man, so the Professor found, was still untransmuted into gold.

XVII

NOW it is the Augustan age and America the modern Rome is in full flower. Poor men have risen to Pro-consul. Strong men from the provinces have become Cæsars at the capital.

And I, the anointed singer, have been their press-agent!

It is our Augustan age. We are all wealthy or those of us who are not wealthy hope to be. That is America today. . . .

Our hordes of richly leisured people are seeking the luxury of mazelike architecture, mild climate and long days of summery ease in Spanish gardens.

The Northwestern land boom which went on from the days of Cornwallis to the deflation of Iowa after Hindenburg's defeat was the age of growth and the pushing out of the frontier. But the boom in the South is the crowning of Cæsar Augustus.

The first colonists came to Virginia and Carolina to be rich and luxurious, Cæsar or nothing. They stayed there and did become rich, and arrogant, but they stayed there, and they are there yet. Now the Yankees who have become Cæsars are going south to join the Older Aristocracy.

The first colonists who came to Massachusetts came there seeking the New Jerusalem. They have wandered all over the Northwest still seeking it. Hamlin Garland's literature of the Border is the cry for the Boston of his dreams. To others the land boom was the new city. To

men like Garland Boston is the New Jerusalem and all his futile wandering Yanks are the chosen people that in the millennium shall be gathered back to reign there forever. This is the day-dream of a soul that never dared to be born into the World As Is and bow the neck to the God of Things As They Are. The English cavaliers that could bow to Cæsar, have done it. The Roundheads that couldn't were dispersed to wander forever in a world that never existed.

In 1679 the bourgeois colonists of Carolina, feeling their oats, in their wealth from agriculture, began building Charles Town as a social capital and began buying titles and were a landed gentry and nobility. When my Alden ancestors from Plymouth Colony at about the same time moved into the wilds of western York state, they, too, went where cheap lands would make them wealthy; and when their later generations paddled up the Erie Canal and out to Wisconsin it was again to get in on the land boom and to become, as I previously have expressed it, "Have-Saw Governors of an I-Done-It State." Our tribal totem teaches us that *God prepared* a land for us, and that the "path of Empire takes its way" wherever our herd migrations lead, and that by "thinking, talking and acting prosperity" our race will be made rich.

My father had been indeed made rich, but he was a Cæsar only in his hallucination. I have known other men who became real Cæsars.

Father's next door neighbor in Kansas became Governor, the first Democrat ever so elected in that old G.A.R. state. When the war broke in Europe this Governor collected a shipload of wheat, the gift of the farmers, and

gave it to Belgium. And the King of Belgium finally decorated this Kansas Democrat. It took much pleading and some literary art. I furnished the literary appeal that persuaded the King. And now, decorated with the Order of Leopold, that Kansan is one of the Augustans visiting the Riviera of the South.

Another Westerner of the New Immigration, a lad born in Europe, and therefore ineligible for the Presidency, engaged my literary talent and mounted to a Cabinet position. Yet I am a futile fellow at the bottom where I began. When the land boom came to Charleston, these two statesmen used me again in realty operations to add to their wealth. They made alluring promises to me, and I worked like the peasant's donkey with hay dangled before it on a pole. Common fools believe a statesman's promises. I had my labor for my credulity and ended even poorer than when I began. . . .

The papers printed a dispatch that "Roy Bradley, the poor newspaper paragrapher, has made a fortune in the Charleston boom," and when the letters of congratulation came I didn't have the price of postage to reply!

I fled the Kansas scene through no land hunger, I had no appetite for *better lands farther west.* I moved because I was fed up by my tribe's propaganda, and I hungered for a hook-up with sublimer men.

I chose the kindly climate of the Carolinas for the sake of my gasping, deflating bellows.

I hankered for a coral city where men were magical, where human souls were like enchanted goldfish swimming underneath the tides of time. In Charleston I found all that I sought. Here was a city that was sunk down

beneath the sea; unkissed by the Prince of Progress she is like a Sleeping Beauty in her crystal coffin.

When from the clock tower of Prosperity a Muezzin calls the nation's Babbittry to prayer, these timeless folk hear not. But in their own charmed, sunken towers the tides move to and fro and in those belfries then an ancient *glockenspiel* is making magic music for drowned souls.

> In the sunken city of Murial
> A golden image dwells,
> And the sound of our poor weeping
> Is as silver bells, where he dwells. . . .

But enough of mystic atmosphere and far-fetched obscurantism. In plain language Charleston, as the last citadel of the Confederacy, despises commerce, population and democracy. It cherishes still the legend of *noblesse oblige* and knows full well that a gentleman no more belongs to the race of boosters than an Arabian horse is brother to a cotton mule.

The first arts in America were nourished in Charleston. The theater, opera, golf, *dueling by code*, science and a natural history museum, these flourished in Charleston long before any other American trading port had been civilized. Indeed Charleston gave the first proofs that Democracy is a fallacy, and gave this demonstration a hundred years before the free-and-equal republic of Jefferson was born.

Said the Lords Proprietors of Carolina province before those *entrepreneurs* had "invited industries" or subdivided any acreage for development in their American land grant: "We can attract fat burghers and prosperous peas-

ants by offering them land at a penny an acre. It is sure to advance in price, and then we can give these roughnecks titles of landed nobility graded according to the number of pennies each invests in acres. This was in the 1670's after the Lords Proprietors had been given the empty territory (not counting the Seminole Indians) which is now North and South Carolina and Georgia, in return for their services to Charles the Second.

And so these Lords, owning cheap acreage, organized a homeseekers' excursion from Merry England with some sort of catch-phrase such as Better Land Further West, and they took a shipload of investors to the Indian infested swamps of Carolina.

Those prosperous small-town merchants and fat farmers of Wessex purchased "Florida Land" in Carolina in accordance with their means. He who bought a thousand acres became a baron, and he who bought ten thousand acres at a penny an acre became a duke. It so happened that these cheap lands were some of the richest acres on earth and easily the most fertile lands in North America, and this Carolina climate was the most salubrious for Englishmen. The dull but diligent Charles Town colonists waxed wealthier than ever from the growing of cane, cotton, rice or indigo, the latter a favored dyestuff of all royalty, coon or white. When this story got out in a London paper of that day, a gang of sure-enough noble boys made a rush to that dear Charles Town like the famous Kansas rush to the Cherokee strip when that rich Indian land was given to the Liberty Boys.

These genuine offshoots of the English nobility mingled with the burgher and fat farmers "nobility" who had

preceded them to Charles Town and the surrounding plantations. In the course of time the eagle brood kicked the big cuckoo out of the nest and those *bona fide* gentry, sprung from the authentic "royal race," had hogged everything in a landed way and were running everything in a political way in Carolina. It was they who eventually took a sarcastic shot at the Free Soilers of Kansas and the Flag o' Freedom itself.

Those original homeseekers and investors who bought their titles with good shillings earned at the Wessex plow handle and the Casterbridge mercantile counter were like the Iowa Society and the Kansas Society of fat wheat farmers and hog farmers in our own day seen strutting the streets of Los Angeles and Miami. They possessed title to "nature's nobility" but they didn't have the nobility.

But when the Charles Town would-be nobility augmented by the infiltration of the sure-enough, hawk-beaked and lion-hearted nobility that came across the sea because they smelled meat, the town of Charles soon built itself up into an aristocratic capital, and all the arts and graces flourished there.

And they flourish there to this day. You will find poets, artists, writers and fighters in that little lost forgotten city to match the cultured output of a dozen Kansas Cities. Yes, the Charlestonians are of the eagle's brood.

But after all the noble eagle is a hawk at heart, and the genuine nobleman preys upon the fat commoner; and when the burghers and bold peasants had made plain the fatness and fertility of Carolina, that those lands exuded

honey and oil and wine, the cavalier came to prey. But he came. That is the main point. The nobility landed here. His seed has not perished, his generations are not extinct. The gentleman is still master of his Charleston.

When the rattlesnake of Kansas, assuming the personification of "John Brown," although "Tom, Dick, or Harry" would have done as well, spat his venom at the gentlemen of Charleston, they answered with cannon balls.

"At a cannon shot upon this fort the whole nation, as if it had been a trained army lying on its arms and awaiting the word of command, arose and began a war which for awfulness rises into the highest rank of bad eminence," said Henry Ward Beecher when the Liberty Boys had overwhelmed the sarcastic gentlemen who took a shot at them. But Beecher's words are blah. The Iowa, Kansas, Illinois and Indiana squirrel men and shallow-draft plow boys were no trained army lying upon its arms but an untrained yokelry lying upon their dirt floors in their tribal dream. They woke to die 'mid flame and smoke and shout and cry and battle stroke—just like the Turk in their school books.

The curtain on this drama is now lowered to represent the passage of sixty years. The great trek into the New West is now on.

But the latter migrations of the Nordic tribe are not being made in covered wagons drawn by ox teams, but in speedier vehicles pushed by a different kind of tallow.

The Kansas peasants who had got rich in Florida found the game getting too high and they cast their eyes up the coast looking for other clean, green lands where the sweet

story of real estate could be told. And so the Nordic Babbittry as it is called to-day (or the fat burghers and Wessex farmers as they were called yesterday) came again under the gates of what was old Charles Town, and what is still the citadel of the hawk-faced gentlemen who fired on Fort Sumter and dangled John Brown's body from the gallows tree.

These Trojan prodigies have fought the "Iowa Idea" and the "Kansas Language" for 250 years, which is much longer than these terms have been known on the buffalo prairies that are now Kansas and Iowa. They fought it with the Constitutional Convention after Jefferson had drooled and spewed it in the Virginia Legislature; they battled it four years with fire and sword in what is called the Civil War. And now they had to battle the Kansas hordes again, this time the fight being carried to their very doors.

In 1861 those Charlestonian drawers-of-the-long-bow had sent their shaft at the Behemoth from afar. To their surprise the stung elephant promptly and blindly charged and trampled Richmond. Indeed that elephant thrashed about through the fields and lanes of all the South, and yet it never quite put its triumphant foot on Charleston. That town remained uncrushed like a great tortoise bogged under the chariot wheels but safe in its *testudino*.

Speaking of elephant and tortoise, there is an old Hindu legend that an elephant upholds the earth; and a similar legend says that the earth is upheld by a monstrous turtle. While a combination of the two legends says that the earth is upheld by the elephant while the elephant in turn is supported by the tortoise.

If you look on civilized Charleston as the tortoise, and on roughneck Kansas as the elephant engaged in holding up the civilized cosmos, you get the picture I am trying to symbolize. The elephant of Progress has stood upon the tortoise of Gentility for sixty years since the "flag was restored on Sumter," and democracy began sitting on the world, and yet the Charleston spirit, coldly reptilian, has kept its head in its shell and its thoughts to itself while the Republican elephant parked on its dorsal architrave has continued to uphold progress and prosperity and a whole world made safe for democracy.

But when the Florida boom moved north, and the Kansans in their closed cars (or covered gas-wagons) followed the course of empire, hollering for their reward, it became plain to me that Charleston must be flung as a meat to these Cæsars, or rather, cast as a pearl to swine. The shell of Charleston was destined to be cleft open; the hour was at hand. The pearl in the shell of their oyster is the land boom, and the Kansans were after that pearl. Their totem teaches them that the reward of Progress is Prosperity. They are the progressive race and are destined to cash in. The pearl of great price is land values, and the lottery of their gods is stacked for them to win it.

I have always seen life as an art and have sought the art patterns in the reality that surrounds me. I discovered that democracy was the belief that Santa Claus rewards good children.

So living in Charleston I stepped out upon the boom stage like a cynic comedian in a Follies of fleshly limbs that glorify something other than intellect alone. I was wit at the Strumpets' Picnic, brains trifling with the real estate

boom. I ballyhooed a bunch of Kansas *bourgeoise gentilhommes* to buy acreage under the rusting guns of Sumter. I sold old ruined, moss-hung manor halls in Poesque gardens (for Poe wrote his *Gold Bug* with the scene laid here, and here suffered the soul agonies that I have suffered, cast out by his Scotch foster father and told to starve as my Scotch Puritan Kansas father wished starvation to be my lot) to John Brown's Free Soil Kansans, and they paid for these storied seats of Aristocracy with multitudinous monies made in the booms of Florida and Los Angeles. I became the press agent of the corrupted Rebel capital and wrote long flattering addresses to the Kansas bounders saying they were "a superior people" and were thus "doubly welcome" to the citadel of the Secluded Gentry, being much wanted for their "rare culture and social charm." The Mayor of the City who knows the arts of the modern politician, commissioned me official booster and crowned me with this accolade.

The Kansas "insiders," whom my press-agentry lured, came and bought on the "ground floor" and then summoned their ever-increasing army of come-on investors; and soon the boom was loading them with easy money.

The Charleston aristocrats seeing that it was useless longer to man the walls against the invasion, indeed, seeing that the tide of the Euphrates had been dammed and diverted and that the Persians were swarming down the river bed into their city, did then throw up the sponge and make a compromise and a new treaty between friend and foe. The Charlestonians and their vulgar rivals, the Kansans, were joined like wolves to feast upon the carcass

of the boom. "No land hath greater mystery than this," wrote the Charleston Minnesinger.

Part of the boom meat to be devoured was me and my holdings. What else! I, who was Kansan by blood and Charlestonian by adoption, was therefore hated by both tribes, like the bat who claimed to be a mouse among mice and a bird among birds; and with that hunger that makes animals gentle, the Charleston hawks and the Kansas coyotes combined to pick my luscious bones.

By all the arts that bankers, statesmen, realtors and foul-mouthed attorneys employ, they came at me. I had acreage and options that they were after; I was no dreamer this time, I had the mazuma.

No poet-realtor could long survive the buffeting in such an obscene harlequinade. The lawyers, bankers, realtors got me. By all the arts and mysteries that are the Big Medicine of Big Business the Babbitts stripped me of my sudden wealth and left me only my girlish laughter and remembered glimpses of the moon.

But I foresaw they would do all this, else I am no grand asinine seer—and have I not boasted that I am a prophet, poet and wizard ringing the changes on the Nordic runes, and prophesying what my race is yet to see? Only as a comic gesture I turned Babbitt and mingled in this carnival throng thinking to unmask at midnight and confound them. But the joke is on me, for they unmasked me by footpadding me to the alley and stealing my clothes and shoes. I am left naked and ashamed before mine enemies.

And so I prophesy what will in turn befall those allies-

in-realty who thus stalked me and devoured my substance. Such teamwork is a union for meat, like the Kansas wolves and the mountain eagles following the buffalo calves. . . . While yet the buffalo herds are back on the prairies, the allied hunters will work together in that "coöperation" for which the Babbitts ever sigh. . . . But when the bovine beef becomes thin pickings, when the Mid-Western migrants brought hither by my press agentry have all been trimmed, then the old eagle blood will assert its punch and the Kansas coyote will be clawed and taken. And the claws that take this imitation wolf will be the eagle's talons.

For the Charlestonians are of eagle blood, they are the proud falcons among predatory men. Their blood is a mixed blood but it is no buzzard blood, they are all hawks; they are pirates, they are slave vendors, they are gentlemen in the grand manner. They kill their own meat.

The new-rich Kansans who have come among them, fattened on the spoil of the Florida boom, are like the old sleek burghers and the Wessex farmers who three centuries ago were lured by land hunger to Charles Town and its plantations, and did purchase out of their stupid purses high titles to nobility along with the broad acres that they coveted. But the biological, or honest-to-God, nobility will take all from them by force and cunning to-day as it despoiled them in the historic yesterday. It was the men of Carolina and Virginia holding the fat tidewater lands that drove the Kansans to the desert in the first place.

The cruel merchant of England, the hawk-faced gentry of the British race, the natural-born pirate who singed

the beard of the King of Spain, these are the ancestors of Charleston; they took their joy of wealth and women and clogged with brag the blustering bushwah the slow minds of the commoners. Their seed-in-the-blood was the dragon seed that sowed the land with soldiers in the Confederate war.

The commoners have their *democracy* and the gentlemen have their *code of chivalry*, the prairies produced their Bryan and Dixie Land its flatulent Calhoun. And the democrats outdone by chivalry are dumber but no less dishonest than their conquerors. The sparrow eaten by the butcher bird is part of nature's mystery and her realism.

The seed of the hawk race is yet dominant in Charleston, and it will be dominant there as long as birds have their nesting season, and eagles mate for life, and human vermin spawns its generations for the Saxon Chronicle.

. . . . . .

But I, Roy Bradley, the ass who would be eagle, also went soaring to the sun. I flung my ecstatic carcass to the Sun God's glory . . . and got disagreeably singed. . . .

Now I am so many bones somehow held together in an ass's skin. As I flop around with a consumptive's restlessness, my sound is a rattling dirge, an aching yawp. I froth at the mouth with frustration. I think of my kin in tradition, another amiable gullible ass, Henry Adams. He maundered in culture-cluttered Boston and sought a meaning to life in books, pictures, concerts and conversation in civilized Europe. Suppose his forefathers had broken out in a new pioneering rash and in their delirium marched across the continent, tearing up the virgin soil

with the labors of their women and fertilizing the land with the sweat and offal of their offspring? Would he have had a different history to write of the Education of Henry Adams . . . ?

Leave me to die in my poverty and loneliness. . . . When the pitiful evening fever sends me into a pleasant, hectic haze, let me think again of the time when I pulsed with aspiration, when I believed in the sanctity of our dream-democracy and ordered my life with the rigor of an idealist and sought only the sanity of culture. . . .

Yet I wake always with a start. The night chill catches me cruelly and I am left fingering the cold small bones of babies. . . .

THE END

CT
275
E34
A3

Date Due

CT
275 Edson, Charles.
E34 Great American ass.
A3

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND
Tacoma, Washington

Collins Memorial Library
CT275.E34 A3 uppa
[Edson, Charles Ler/"The great American
3 5121 00099 7505